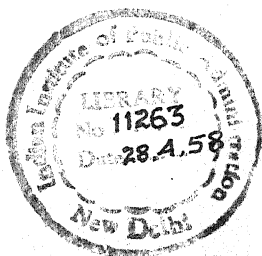


# INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS:

An Historical sketch

By  
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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1934

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## CHAPTER I

### TRIAL OF THE PARLIAMENTARY METHOD

1885-1904

#### § 1.—*Origin*

In fairness it must be stated that the Indian National Congress is not only the logical outcome of British rule, but that it owes its origin to the efforts of Englishmen, particularly of Allan Octavian Hume.

Writers on the Indian national movement are apt to suggest that a foreign autocracy such as the Government of India must ultimately arouse a nationalist opposition, forgetting however that for many years of its existence the Congress, which they regard as the nationalist opposition, did not dream of undertaking the functions of such an opposition. It is even sought to give the Congress an impersonal origin, a birth in circumstance, a spontaneous character rather than admit that it was the creation of an individual. Its roots, it is said, are to be discovered in the separate political associations in various parts of India ; it was watered, we are told, by the controversies over the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act, the reduction of the age limit for entrance into the Indian Civil Service and the Ilbert Bill. 'Neither Indians nor Englishmen', Mr. Rushbrook Williams assures us, 'can claim to be its sole creators.' But it was Hume who, by means of a public letter

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to the graduates of Calcutta University, persuaded the educated classes of Bengal to take a part in his organization and work for the regeneration and political advancement of India. And it was he who organized this political consciousness in the country in a 'Native Parliament' and brought it to the notice not only of the Government of India but of the British people. As the General Secretary of the Congress for many years he led the leaders of Indian nationalism.

'No Indian,' declared Gokhale, 'could have started the Indian National Congress.' The reason is not far to seek. Apart from the fact that anyone undertaking so great an enterprise would need a personality and an influence possessed by few Indians at the time, since their ambitions were mainly local, there is not the slightest doubt that if an Indian had the temerity to launch it, it would have been nipped in the bud by the officials. Such was the official distrust of political agitation in those days that had not the founder of the Congress been an Englishman and a distinguished ex-official, the authorities would have at once found some way or other of suppressing the movement.

As a matter of fact official patronage, which was at first generously given—and Lord Dufferin even persuaded Hume to give his organization a political character from the first,—was openly withdrawn as soon as the Government noticed that the masses were being directly addressed. It is somewhat ironical that the encouragement given to the retired civil servant to bring about an organization which would serve as a means whereby Government might become aware of what educated

India was thinking and as a nucleus of what might some day develop into an Indian Parliament should have produced the Indian National Congress such as we know it, a thorn in the side of the Government, a loud and resolute critic, and the bitterest enemy of officialdom.

However, Hume could not foresee later developments. He believed that aliens like himself, in spite of their love for India and their endeavours on her behalf, lacked the essential of nationality, and the real work had therefore to be done by the children of the soil. Scattered individuals were powerless singly; what was needed was union, organization and well defined lines of action; and to secure these an association was required, armed and organized with unusual care, having for its object the promotion of the mental, moral, social and political regeneration of the people. 'If only fifty men, good and true can be found to join us as founders, the thing can be established,' declared Hume, 'and further development will be comparatively easy.'

The first meeting of the Congress was attended by seventy-two delegates, exceeding his modest expectations. The details of the organization had to be settled by the members themselves, but he made suggestions as to the personnel, discipline and working methods of the Association; and specially he insisted on its constitution being democratic and free from personal ambitions. The head, he maintained, should merely be the chief servant, and his council assistant servants. These were the main ideas embodied in his open letter addressed to the graduates of Calcutta University on 1st March 1883. He closed it with

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an appeal which deserves to be remembered : 'As I said before, you are the salt of the land. And if amongst even you, the elite, fifty men cannot be found with sufficient power of self-sacrifice, sufficient love and pride in their country, sufficient genuine and unselfish heartfelt patriotism to take the initiative, and if needs be, devote the rest of their lives to the cause—then there is no hope for India. Her sons must and will remain mere humble and helpless instruments in the hands of foreign rulers, for "they would be free themselves must strike the blow,". . . . Every nation secures precisely as good a government as it merits.'

The letter went home. Local committees were formed at Karachi, Ahmedabad, Surat, Bombay, Poona, Madras, Calcutta, Benares, Allahabad, Lucknow, Agra and Lahore, all of which promised to attend as a whole or to send representatives to the Congress. Until the formation of a Central Committee, Hume undertook the work of General Secretary and went to England in order to consult with friends there as to the best means of getting a hearing for Indian aspirations. He observed that the general public read little about India except what Reuter chose to send to *The Times* and other newspapers, telegrams with a strongly official flavour. Hume therefore arranged for an Indian Telegraph Union and obtained the consent of several provincial newspapers including the *Manchester Guardian* to receive and publish telegrams from the Union. The scheme, however, had to be dropped for want of funds. To impress Parliament with the case for India he proposed to secure a seat in the House of Commons through the influence of friends for an Indian member,

Dadabhai Naoroji. He was helped by Sir William Wedderburn and other 'Members for India' who did much, though without striking positive result, to educate the public on Indian affairs.

Hume returned to India in time for the first Congress which was to have been held at Poona but which, owing to an outbreak of cholera there, was held at Bombay. For the first time the aims and objects of the Congress were publicly defined by the President, W. C. Bonnerjee. They were:—

(a) The promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country's cause in various parts of the Empire.

(b) The eradication by direct friendly personal intercourse of all possible race, creed or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country, and the fuller development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity that had their origin in their beloved Lord Ripon's ever memorable reign.

(c) The authoritative record, after this has been carefully elicited by the fullest discussion, of the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing of the social questions of the day.

(d) The determination of the lines upon and methods by which during the next twelve months it is desirable for native politicians to labour in the public interest.

There were nine resolutions in all moved at this session, most of which were tirelessly repeated year after year at every subsequent meeting of the Congress, for though moderately expressed, they embodied claims which the Government, constituted as it was, would not concede without a greater show of agitation.

The history of the Indian national movement discloses an unfortunate time-lag between the publicly expressed intentions of the Government and the administrative or legislative action required

to give effect to them; in the meanwhile the national movement had advanced to a position from which the significance of these concessions, reforms or whatever they may be was altogether lost to appreciation. This happened at the time of the Morley-Minto Reforms, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and again during the critical years between 1929 and 1932. It was probably difficult for the Government to move quickly in these matters considering the wide variety of interests and powers that had to be placated and won over; but none the less the opinion commonly held of the national demands was that they were the desires of a 'microscopic minority'—a sneering phrase of Lord Dufferin's—and therefore negligible. In this the Government was palpably wrong, for history teaches us not only in India but throughout the world that change is wrought not by masses and majorities but by minorities, microscopic minorities, who have the gift of leadership. The Indian National Congress, even if it represents a microscopic minority still, has been a tremendous force within the land which neither contemptuous indifference nor determined hostility has been able to suppress.

The Congress did not start as an anti-Government organization. For many years its first resolution was always the presentation of its respectful loyalty to the Queen-Empress. The proceedings of the early sessions are dully respectable, almost sycophantically moderate and always couched in amiable language. There was neither the desire nor the hope for responsibility at the Centre and if it had been suggested that India should sever the connexion with England the delegates would



probably have died from shock. The Congress passed resolutions mainly concerned with the growing association of Indians in the work of administration. This is not to say, however, that it was not interesting itself in the problem of government. For instance it asked for a Royal Commission to inquire into the working of Indian administration; prayed for the abolition of the India Council; requested that elected members should be admitted to the Legislative Councils which should have the right of interpellation; argued the case for simultaneous examinations in India and England for the Indian Civil Service; and protested against increasing military expenditure. But the tone of all these resolutions was advisory; in fact the Congress was in the initial stages a dignified debating society, with this difference, that its members were, from the second Congress onwards, elected from all parts of India, and were in a sense national representatives.

## § 2.—*Social Conditions*

That delegates from every province of India could meet annually for the discussion of political problems and the statement of national aspirations is a fact of great significance. The soil had been prepared by the East India Company and the Government of India for the germination of the Congress idea. Under the Act of 1813 public funds were made available for education and a Committee of Public Instruction was appointed to administer them. There was, however, a controversy, in which Ram Mohan Roy took a distinguished part, over the learning, oriental or western, that was to be promoted with their aid.

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But it was Macaulay, with his strong prejudices, who as the President of the Committee in 1834 decided once and for all that the development of English education was the paramount duty of the Government. He aimed at establishing the English language and literature in the predominant position which the Greek and Latin classics enjoyed in England, and he expected that in this way a class of men would arise, Indian in blood and colour, but English in ideas and culture. But the literature on which they were brought up was the literature of liberty, of revolt—the writings of Tom Paine, Mill and Mazzini. It was natural therefore that the ideas which western culture introduced to Indians should create in them a love for liberty, for national unity and an understandable ambition to improve the condition of the masses. But the tenure of the British in India was thought to depend upon the withholding of the keys of power from Indians; and this contradiction between educational policy and political policy was bound to lead to discontent and later to open conflict.

The Government was prepared, however, to accept Indians in its employment. The decision to introduce western education had this practical objective, as it was considered desirable to associate Indians with the subordinate departments of the Company's services. By an Act passed in 1793 the appointment to any civil office in the Company's territories carrying a salary of over £800 a year had been confined to covenanted servants of the East India Company. No Indian had ever been nominated to that service, and it was not proposed to change the position. But

the subordinate services were thrown open to Indians by legislation passed by Parliament in 1833 to the effect that no man was to be excluded from office in India by reason of his race or religion.

Limited as the opportunities were, the English-educated classes took advantage of them eagerly, for they were in dire need of employment. A knowledge of English was a useful if not indispensable qualification for service in Government offices and consequently English education became popular and schools and colleges were regarded as training centres for recruits to the Government services. To this day both the Government and the public have not been able to free themselves from this conception of education, which is highly destructive of genuine scholarship and culture. Naturally enough as the number of available posts is always limited, disappointed candidates for Government service tended to increase as the years passed and discontent drove them into the national movement or subversive activities. It is significant that Congress leaders like Surendranath Banerjea and C. R. Das, the former dismissed with ignominy from the Indian Civil Service and the latter unable to obtain a place by competition, found themselves in the nationalist camp and became centres of popular agitation.

These were not the only results of western education. Through the medium of the English language came to the stereotyped intellectual life of India the thought of Europe, explaining the success of European arms in the east and the higher plane of European material civilization. Men made comparisons with Hinduism and found it stagnant, decadent, unprogressive. Ram Mohan

Roy introduced a reformed Church into Hinduism, but more important than changes in religious belief, were the new knowledge and the new principles of inquiry into the material world which could be studied by Hindus without damage to their ancient faith. There was, nevertheless, a violent reaction against Hinduism and all the meaningless accretions of custom and prejudice it had carried for centuries.

The youthful students of European culture attacked Hinduism and its institutions, ascribing to their evil influence the political misfortunes of the country. Not only was *suttee* abolished, but young men advocated far-reaching social reforms, urging the remarriage of widows, for instance, a practice totally forbidden by Hindu custom. So absorbed was this first generation of English-educated Indians in the pleasurable occupation of shocking their parents that their political servitude received little attention. There was even a controversy during the early days of the Congress whether social reform should not precede political reform. At the second Congress Dadabhai Naoroji dealt with the suggestion that the Congress should take up questions of social reform lest failure to do so be urged as a reproach against it. He pointed out that the Congress met together as a political body to represent to the rulers their political aspirations irrespective of the class or community to which they belonged, not to discuss social reforms. There were Hindus of every caste, there were Muslims and Christians of various denominations, Parsis, Sikhs, Brahmos and what not, assembled at the meeting, and it was impossible for such a mixed gathering to discuss the social

reforms needed in each individual class. He was right; while each class and community had to undertake responsibility for its own reform, the Congress, representing all, had to concern itself with their common aspirations.

For the most part however social reform remained a good platform subject about which young men in their clubs and associations bandied frothy arguments; but that was as far as it got. The hope that knowledge would filter down to the masses has never been realized. Western education created a class to be found in every caste and community of India which was sharply divided from fellow members of the caste or community. These young men found, on returning to their homes from their schools and colleges, that their new ideas cut no ice with their womenfolk who, preoccupied with domestic or biological functions, cared little for western knowledge except in so far as it could increase their housekeeping money. Social reform had therefore to be gradually abandoned as an active policy though it survived as a subject of philanthropic interest and a common topic of popular discussion.

The educated classes enjoyed a traditional monopoly of literary knowledge and did not therefore excite the envy of other classes either in town or village. Macaulay's policy did not accomplish much more than a surface disturbance of Indian society. The establishment of universities in 1854 did not improve matters either, for they merely advanced by another stage the period of training advantageous from the point of view of a young man's entry into Government service. Education still refused to filter down to the

masses. While the universities went on producing graduates year after year to fill Government offices in clerical and subordinate positions, the condition of the masses was progressively becoming worse. The competition of foreign manufactures had already killed or was gradually killing Indian handicrafts. Agriculture was becoming less and less able to provide the rural population with a tolerable subsistence. The resolution of the third Congress on the connexion between education and the poverty of the people is worth noting: 'That having regard to the poverty of the people, it is desirable that the Government be moved to elaborate a system of technical education, suitable to the condition of the country, to encourage indigenous manufactures by a more strict observance of the orders already existing in regard to utilizing such manufactures for State purposes, and to employ more extensively than at present, the skill and talents of the people of the country.' The point made in this resolution has been repeated ever since by subsequent Congresses and by educationists, economists and others who have urged upon the Government a policy of linking education closely with the economic development of the country.

Western education gave Indians a language which became the means of communication between the educated classes irrespective of their geographical distribution. It also gave them newspapers. The first Bengali periodical appeared in 1816 and soon such papers multiplied. During the Mutiny a rigid censorship was imposed but was afterwards suffered to lapse. It was however the Vernacular Press that was critical of the

Government to the point of sedition, a term variously interpreted; and a Vernacular Press Act was passed by Lord Lytton to restrain its exuberance but was afterwards repealed in 1882 by Lord Ripon. There is no gainsaying the fact however that the Indian Press played an important part in the political education of the intelligentsia. The men behind the newspapers were well versed in European political theories though they lived under conditions which denied them. They found unrestricted scope to propagate their ideas even though at the time nobody considered them to be practicable. The result was that newspaper education created an urban class claiming political liberty, inspired by a nationalist sentiment and with leanings towards democratic institutions, but forced by stringent circumstances to compromise with themselves. Gokhale explained the mental conflict to which this class had gradually become subjected: 'A kind of dwarfing or stunting of the Indian race is going on under the present system. We must live all the days of our life in an atmosphere of inferiority and the tallest of us must bend in order that the exigencies of the existing system may be satisfied.....The moral elevation which every self-governing people feels cannot be felt by us. Our administrative and military talents must gradually disappear owing to sheer disuse, till at last our lot, as hewers of wood and drawers of water in our own country, is stereotyped.'

We have also to take into account the estrangement between the races. The Mutiny ended a regime which, in spite of all its defects, had made possible social relations between Indians



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and Englishmen which helped them to understand each other. The Mutiny, however, bequeathed bitter memories, fear on the one side and malignity on the other. The Englishman in India began to believe himself to be an exile, and acted accordingly. The belief was strengthened rather than reduced by the facility of travel between India and England after the opening of the Suez Canal. For it was now possible to return to England frequently on leave (later regularized and charged to the Indian revenues by the Lee Commission) and it was also possible to bring English women to live in India. Englishmen who had formerly been thrown entirely on the company of Indians now withdrew into their own circles, living an exclusive life and permitting nothing beyond stiffly formal relations in their official capacity with the Indian people. They became definitely 'birds of passage'. The Government's reluctance to admit Indians to the higher posts helped to turn the Europeans into a separate caste, the 'White Brahmins', as they have been called, with the usual features of the caste system—endogamy, commensality and mutual control by members.

The antagonism between the races indicated by this mode of life manifested itself during the controversy over the Ilbert Bill. This Bill was intended to remove the judicial disqualification to which Indian members of the Indian Civil Service were subject, since they were not permitted to hear accusations brought against Europeans. From 1870 Indians managed to enter the I.C.S. through open competition in England, overcoming the handicaps imposed by the deliberately fixed



low standard of Indian university education and the prejudice against undertaking a voyage across the sea. They were mostly appointed to the judicial branch of the service; but in 1883 some of these men had reached a degree of seniority which would entitle them to rank shortly as district and sessions judges. The Bill was therefore introduced into the Governor-General's Council by Sir Courtenay Ilbert, the Law Member, to equalize the position of Indian-born with European judges and magistrates. It however provoked tremendous opposition organized by the indigo- and tea-planters, who were accustomed to getting seriously involved in criminal cases, and their cause was noisily backed up by the business men of Calcutta. There was a plan actually to capture and deport Lord Ripon, the Governor-General with 'native' sympathies; and when he left Bombay, amid an historic display of Indian admiration and gratitude, an English club is said to have decorated its walls with brooms, to convey the transitoriness of his work, for it was expected that his successor would sweep away all his non-sensical ideas about equity and equality. The agitation was a success, but educated Indians all over the country were stirred as never before by the unjustified slur cast upon their judicial fairness. The point was driven home by a succession of cases where manslaughter of Indians was alleged against British soldiers and civilians. These cases were often treated by the Courts in a manner suggesting the half-conscious recognition that an Indian life was not so valuable as that of a European.

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### § 3.—*Early Opposition*

For many years the Congress did not entertain the idea of embarking upon agitation, constitutional or otherwise. It was composed of moderate leaders of public opinion who expected to win their way with the Government by patient persuasion. There was besides no question of first-rate importance upon which, even if they were so inclined, a public agitation could be engineered. That the Congress showed potentialities in this direction in spite of its pacific policy is evident from the reaction of the conservative classes to its colourless programme. Within three years of its existence the Congress attracted to itself the suspicion and hostility of an organization now lost to fame called the United Indian Patriotic Association. This body took upon itself the duty of conducting propaganda against the Congress, and in this activity it was joined by *The Pioneer* of Allahabad which published articles and reports of speeches by persons denouncing the Congress and all its works. A collection of these reports and articles published in 1888 to show 'the seditious character of the Indian National Congress and the opinions held by eminent natives of India who are opposed to the movement' gives an insight into the psychology of the reactionaries of the time, both English and Indian.

They set out to prove that the debating society miscalled the Indian *National Congress* did not represent the opinions of 200,000,000 people as it was said to do, because 'not only have large public meetings all over India condemned the movement, but more than forty political

associations have expressed their bitter hostility to it'. Introducing his contributors, the editor Theodore Beck mentions people like the Raja of Bhinga, the Maharaja of Benares, Sir Sayed Ahmed, Syed Hosain Bilgrami, and His Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, the patron of the Association. He informs his readers that 'the members of the United Indian Patriotic Association, while strongly opposed to the introduction of representative institutions as utterly unfitted for the present state of the country, yield to none in their desire for the true advancement of the people. But they do not believe that the way to secure this end is by an effort to wrest the power from the hands of the Indian Government or by attempting to coerce it, either by uninformed British electors or by the ignorant masses of India.'

The views put forward by these reactionaries reveal the inhibitions, the self-distrust or the 'slave mentality' which existed side by side with the exalted aspirations finding expression in the Congress. They argued that democracy was not suited to India on account of the caste system ; that appeals to the masses were likely to end in revolution and massacre ; that representative government was impossible ; that criticism of the Government was likely to weaken its power ; and that, as the *The Pioneer* recommended, the movement should be suppressed—for which a dozen policemen would be ample ! There is a strange likeness in these arguments and asseverations to the views expressed by unsympathetic officials and to the propaganda organized all over the country in 1932 in the form of loyalty meetings. But the position of the proscribed

Congress of 1932 was different from that of the Congress of 1888 which was not only a harmless body but a gratified recipient of mild official patronage.

Nevertheless the fourth Congress at Allahabad was heralded by a tumultuous outbreak of opposition. Both Sir Auckland Colvin, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces, and Lord Dufferin were openly hostile. The utmost effort was made to prevent the meeting at Allahabad, but the reception committee managed to get a house belonging to an absentee Nawab by secret manœuvres. The organization of anti-Congress associations gave warmth and enthusiasm to the Congress meeting, and there were many sympathisers who gave anonymous donations, visiting the leaders by night. For even in those days to be suspected of political leanings not fully approved of by officialdom was to invite persecution in the form of demands for heavy security for good behaviour. A delegate to the Madras Congress who had attended in defiance of his district officer was called on to give security of Rs. 20,000 to keep the peace. In one district of the Punjab, in one year, security for good behaviour was demanded from 5,000 to 6,000 persons. Evidently the Congress was becoming popular throughout the country and the officials were making belated attempts to suppress it. Opposition and persecution would have had only one result if successful ; it would have driven the national movement underground. The Congress accepted the challenge and its propaganda became bolder and more widespread. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets and leaflets were distributed ; lectures were given everywhere ; and

the result was that three millions took a direct part in the elections for the delegates, of whom out of the 1,500 elected 1,248 attended at Allahabad.

#### § 4.—*Constructive Criticism*

George Yule was President at Allahabad, the first non-Indian to hold that office. He was a Calcutta merchant with a genuine sympathy for Indian aspirations. In his presidential address he argued for the right of representation, comparing the revenue and expenditure of India with that of England and deploring the fact that while not a penny of the income of the British Government was raised without the consent of the people, there was not a man outside the Supreme Council in India who had a voice in the matter of the Indian budget. He drew another telling moral from the fact that there were many thousands of Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and other gentlemen in the country who, if they were to transfer their persons to England for twelve months or more and pay certain rates, would be qualified to enjoy all the rights and privileges of British subjects. 'If you and I go to England', he said, 'we are qualified. If we return to India, our character changes, and we are not qualified. In England we should be trusted citizens. In India, well, the charitably minded among our opponents say that we are incipient traitors.'

In 1889 Charles Bradlaugh visited India, was presented with an address by the Congress at Bombay and undertook to introduce in the House of Commons a Bill for the reform and expansion of the Legislative Councils on which he secured

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the opinions of Congress leaders. At this meeting, presided over by Sir William Wedderburn, another Englishman who was closely associated with the Congress and who carried on an incessant publicity campaign in England for a liberal India policy, Surendranath Banerjea had the task entrusted to him of appealing for funds. He made the appeal. A wave of enthusiasm passed over the vast gathering, and in an hour's time a sum of Rs. 64,000 was subscribed and more than Rs. 20,000 paid on the spot. Ladies present at the meeting gave away their watches and even their jewellery. This was to happen on many subsequent occasions but it is interesting to note this, the earliest instance of the practical interest taken by Indian women in the national movement.

By one of the resolutions adopted at this session a deputation to England was appointed 'to represent the views of the Congress and to press upon the attention of the British public the political reforms which the Congress advocated'. The political reforms desired were equivalent to the beginnings of representative government by the expansion and reconstitution of the Councils. A skeleton scheme had been adopted and entrusted to Bradlaugh for introduction in Parliament. The members of the deputation, who paid their own expenses, included Hume, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjea, Sharifuddin, and Eardley Norton. The British Committee of the Congress arranged meetings for the deputation in England, and these meetings were successful in arousing an interest in Indian affairs wherever they were held. The deputation interviewed Gladstone who promised to speak at the second reading of Lord



Cross's Bill on the expansion of the Council and to support the elective principle. The elective principle was not however conceded, but a definite advance towards it was made. Under the Indian Councils Act of 1892 the Legislative Councils both Central and Provincial were enlarged, and non-official members could be elected to them. Further the Act gave members the right to discuss the annual financial statement, and also to put questions under certain conditions. Thus the Councils became more than merely advisory. As in 1919 Parliament and the Government of India felt that they could authorize a larger advance in the Provinces than at the Centre, and so the majority of the non-official seats in the Provincial Councils were filled by the recommendation of various bodies such as municipal and district boards, groups of large landowners, chambers of commerce, and universities.

In comparison with subsequent developments this change might appear to have been worthless ; but the right of interpellation and of discussion of the financial statement as exercised by the members of these Councils did introduce a liveliness and a reality into the proceedings in the Councils and mark an important stage in the development of popular government in India. It was a step which gratified the Congress, since it was believed to have been the result of the representations made by it. There was gratitude for the reform, though the Congress naturally enough continued to demand the elective principle in representative government.

It should not be supposed however, that the Congress, composed though it was of the wealthy and educated classes, did not interest itself in the

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poverty of the masses. Excessive military expenditure and the salt tax which weighed upon the poor had become the subject of resolutions in earlier Congresses. At the Sixth Congress in Calcutta a resolution was moved for the reduction of the salt tax, from two rupees eight annas to two rupees per maund. It provided an occasion for pointing out the miseries suffered by the masses 'who are hardly cheered by a single ray of hope or relieved by a single day of rest'. Next year the subject came up again, and a member, in words as surprisingly true today as they were in 1891, drew a picture of millions in India who 'have not from year's end to year's end a sufficiency of food. From one day to another they do not know, what every one of us knows every day of his life, what it is to have their stomachs full.'

The most striking speech was made by Lala Murlidhar speaking in Urdu: 'You, you, it seems, are content to join with these accursed monsters in battenning on the heart's blood of your brethren (*cries of No, No*). I say *Yes*; look round! What are all these chandeliers and lamps, and hats, and English coats and bonnets and frocks, and silver-mounted canes, and all the luxurious fittings of your houses, but trophies of India's misery, mementoes of India's starvation! Every rupee you have spent on Europe-made articles is a rupee of which you have robbed your poorer brethren, honest handicraftsmen, who can now no longer earn a living. Of course I know that it was pure philanthropy which, to facilitate this, repealed the import duties and flung away three crores a year of revenue which the rich paid, and to balance this wicked sacrifice raised the



salt tax, which the poor pay ; which is now pressing factory regulations on us, to kill, if possible, the one tiny new industrial departure India could boast. Oh, yes, it is all philanthropy, but the result is that from this cause, amongst others, your brethren are starving.'

Later the ideas underlying this indictment of well-to-do Indians took the form of *swadeshi*, boycott of foreign goods and *khaddar* propaganda. The Congress did not leave it to Mr. Gandhi many years later to find fault with the salt tax, though it could not organize a spectacular agitation for its abolition. The Congress protested also against the Forest Laws which extinguished the communal rights of the ryot, and the Land Revenue Administration which was leading to the gradual deterioration of agriculture. The solution for these evils offered was the Indianization of the services which would reduce the expenses of the Government, reduction of taxation and a voice for the people in the legislatures of their own country through their elected representatives. That was the immediate objective. The Congress did not at this stage trouble overmuch about positive economic policies to improve the condition of the agricultural population.

At the same session military matters were also discussed in detail. Tilak, who spoke on a resolution on the subject, pointed out that the Government undertook to defend two hundred and fifty million people against wild beasts and the Russian bear of the North. As their own returns showed, they did not successfully defend the people against wild beasts and as for the northern enemy they would doubtless do their best when the time

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came, but meanwhile their preparations were crushing the life out of the country. Did they wish the people to starve to death because the Russians might make a raid twenty-five years hence? A question of this kind however had as little effect on the Government of India in those days as its reiteration at the present day with suitable modifications might have upon Governments in Europe or any other continent arming feverishly for the coming war.

The Congress objected to the Arms Act in the first place because it did not allow Indians to bear arms even for utilitarian purposes and consequently the ryots suffered much from the depredations of wild animals; and in the second place because not only did the prohibition affront national pride but cause the gradual and visible emasculation of the people. The Congress therefore suggested a modification of the rules under the Arms Act to ensure the liberal concession of licenses. To the end that Indians should be qualified to defend their homes and their Government it asked for military colleges where young men might be trained for military careers as commissioned or non-commissioned officers of the Indian Army according to capacity and qualifications, the organization of a system of militia service and the authorization of a widespread system of volunteering. But it was soon found that in military matters the Government was less amenable to reason than it was in political matters.

The outbreak of famine caused the Congress to give more of its attention to the agricultural problem of India. While it welcomed relief measures, it asked for an inquiry into the causes

of famine and for a policy which would in future prevent its recurrence. It saw in the high land assessment a cause of the ryot's inability to save from his meagre income, and hence his indebtedness and lack of staying power. The absence of industries prevented the people from taking to new occupations, and instead of encouraging the growth of industries there was the extraordinary spectacle of the Government discouraging them by means of countervailing duties and inviting the importation of foreign goods. There was not the slightest chance of securing protection for indigenous manufactures, nor was protection asked for. All that was demanded was an 'open door' for Indian manufacturers in their own country.

Indian public opinion welcomed such criticisms as the *Manchester Guardian* made on the condition of the Indian people: 'We are forced to ask ourselves whether these economic evils may not be traced directly or indirectly to that famous system of Government which has been slowly built up by the labours of many great Englishmen, and whether, while anxious to do our best for India, to give her a thoroughly just and good administration, we are not unconsciously undermining the foundation of Indian society, which rests upon the peasant cultivator in his village community.....The whole system of land tenure and of taxation is called in question by the repeated famines, each worse than the one before it, which we have witnessed of late years.' It was a view of Indian economics which found increasing acceptance among those who took any trouble to think deeply about the poverty of India.

The interest of the Congress was evidenced by the presidential address of D. E. Wacha in 1901 which dwelt at great length on the subject of famine and the measures taken to relieve the stricken population. The following year the Congress passed resolutions calling for remedies for the great poverty of the Indian people. It recommended, among other measures, the revival of indigenous arts and crafts and the introduction of new industries ; the establishment of technical schools and colleges ; and the organization of rural credit through agricultural banks. Above all it requested that an inquiry into the economic condition of the people should be set on foot with a view to placing the Government in possession of economic data and enabling adequate measures to be devised.

#### § 5.—*The Congress Objective*

Gradually the Congress lost its early apologetic tone and began boldly to criticize the administration. It was prepared to concede to the British 'the blessings of peace, the establishment of law and order, the introduction of western education and the freedom of speech and appreciation of liberal institutions that have followed in its wake—all these things, which stand to the credit of British rule'. But the leaders wanted industries, social emancipation and self-government. Gokhale spoke indignantly of broken promises, of a policy of retrogression which was responsible for the curtailment of educational grants and for the treatment accorded to municipalities. The abolition of the India Council was urged, and caustic comments were made on its expenses, including the wages of 28

housemaids, 1 housekeeper and 3 charwomen. Emphatic protests were made against the injustice and impolicy of imposing an excise duty on cotton manufactured in India, and the conviction was loudly proclaimed that in so doing the interests of India were sacrificed. Men talked of 'insane imperialism' and looked with little favour upon British jingoism. The plague measures and the prosecution of Tilak were condemned. Tilak was tried by a judge and jury of six Europeans and three Indians and was convicted by six votes to three, which to the Congress was significant. The Nattu brothers were imprisoned without trial; punitive police were quartered in Poona. All these administrative acts amounted, in the opinion of the Congress, to a denial of liberty. In discussing events such as these Congressmen could not refrain from mentioning Magna Carta and the Habeas Corpus Act and demanding that the rule of law that informed the British Constitution should also inform the British administration in India.

Racial discrimination angered the nationalists as probably nothing else did. The reservation of various public institutions and amenities or even railway compartments 'for Europeans only' caused much bitterness. The reduction of the pay of Indians in the higher services and the exclusion of Indian members of the educational service from certain posts had the appearance of racial discrimination. The Engineering College of Roorkee was closed to Asiatics of pure descent. People pointed out the quaintness of the decision since Asiatics of impure descent were not excluded and a privilege was thus given to illegitimacy. The disabilities of Indians in South Africa roused intense feelings.

‘In India’, said a Congressman, ‘we are permitted to become members of the Imperial Legislative Council. In England, even the doors of that august assembly, the House of Commons, are open to us. But in South Africa we are not permitted to travel without a pass, we are not allowed to walk about in the night, we are consigned to locations, we are denied admission to the first and second classes on railways, we are driven out of tramcars, we are pushed off footpaths, we are kept out of hotels, we are refused the benefit of the public paths, we are spat upon, we are hissed, we are cursed, we are abused, and we are subjected to a variety of other indignities which no human being can patiently endure.’ This was a painful tale. The stories from South Africa which were reported to India in great abundance after Mr. Gandhi emigrated to that unhappy part of the world, were bound to make Indians’ blood boil.

Naturally the status of inferiority which Indians enjoyed abroad was ascribed not merely to colour or race prejudice but to the political servitude which prevailed in India, the home of the ‘coolie’ race. Presiding at the Congress meeting of 1897 Sir (then Mr.) Sankaran Nair discussed this problem. He said that the British Colonies justified their bad treatment of Indians by reference to ‘our degraded position in our own country . . . . On this race question no concession is possible. No compromise can be accepted in so far as it lies in us. We must insist on perfect equality. Inequality means race inferiority, national abasement. Acquisition, therefore, of all civil rights conferred on Englishmen, removal of all disabilities of Indians as such—these must be our aim.’

## § 6.—*The Spirit of the Congress*

On the whole the Congress remained on friendly terms with the Government. However severe its criticism, absolute trust in the British sense of justice persisted. It was the fervent belief of the earlier generation of Congressmen that the success of their ambitions depended upon their ability to convince the people and Parliament of Great Britain of the justice of their claims. Their activities were therefore undertaken with one eye on Westminster. Sincerely they believed that as soon as Englishmen appreciated their merits they would give them self-government as a gift from the British nation, freely and gladly bestowed. The Englishmen associated with the Congress, Hume and Wedderburn, encouraged the idea. Hume was General Secretary of nineteen of the first twenty-two Congresses, though never President, with Surendranath Banerjea or D. E. Wacha to assist him. Wedderburn, who ran the British Committee of the Congress, and was, with Dadabhai Naoroji, a 'Member for India', did all he could to persuade his countrymen to take an intelligent interest in Indian affairs. This attitude of waiting upon England for political concessions made it possible not only for Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians to join the Congress but secured the adherence of Englishmen including merchants, lawyers and politicians, though not members of the Government services. No fewer than four Britons took the presidential chair during the first twenty years of its existence, and they were harsher critics of the Government than Indians dared to be. The close association of



Englishmen with Indians gave Congress activities a moderate, liberal tone.

A question which arose in connexion with the 1890 Congress elicited the following reply from the Governor-General's private secretary: 'The Government of India recognize that the Congress movement is regarded as representing what would in Europe be called the advanced Liberal Party, as distinguished from the great body of Conservative opinion which exists side by side with it. They desire themselves to maintain an attitude of neutrality in their relations with both parties so long as these act strictly within their constitutional function.' The Congress performed the useful function of criticism which, however, was expressed in constitutional form, though it was directed against institutions, practices and policies. Led by such moderate men as Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjea and G. K. Gokhale, the Congress was without a rival in the political field. It was not until the controversy over the partition of Bengal irritated the Muslims that a Muslim League in competition with the Congress was formed. As long as Gokhale and other leading moderates had any influence, the Congress was not to be captured by extremist politicians such as Tilāk.

During its first phase, 1885 to 1904, the annual meetings of the Congress, which were progressively better attended by delegates from every province of India, served as a school of political education for the whole country. By holding the sessions at different towns and cities, thereby covering the entire peninsula every few years, it promoted the sense of national unity. Though it was mainly a Hindu organization, it included members of every community.



Taking their cue from Lord Curzon, the officials regarded it contemptuously as an organization of a self-seeking minority ; but even so they were compelled to give some attention to its representations. For the first time there was an organization devoted to the study and discussion of All-India questions, led by men of All-India reputation, with All-India support. Its deliberations were no more visionary and unpractical than those of political parties who formed an opposition. The Congress, it is true, had no administrative experience and many of its proposals would probably have failed if put into practice. But that was inevitable. It must be borne in mind that the Congress was demanding opportunities, which it had never enjoyed, of carrying out its ideas. It is sufficient testimony to the inherent soundness of its proposals for administrative and other reforms that many which, when they were first proposed were declared to be absurd and impossible, have since been adopted without dislocation or disaster. The holding of simultaneous examinations in India and in England for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service, the organization of a Training College for military officers and the grant of commissions in the Indian Army to Indians, the enlargement of the composition and functions of the Legislative Councils and other reforms demanded by the Congress have not been followed by the dreadful consequences which officialdom foresaw in those days.

It should be stated nevertheless that far-reaching as were the criticisms made by Congressmen, they were remarkably free from bitterness. There was no doubt that enlightened officials of all grades and positions appreciated the frankness

with which nationalist views on a given question were expressed ; and this must have been a refreshing change from the obsequious agreement which formerly greeted every statement made by a Government official. In spite of a few individual cases of persecution Congressmen were let alone. But official patronage was withdrawn from the Congress and Government servants were forbidden to take any part in its proceedings. In 1890 the Bengal Government circularized its officers against attending the Calcutta Congress even as visitors ; this had to be withdrawn at the instance of the Government of India.

It is said that when Sir William Cotton after his retirement—he had been Chief Commissioner of a Province—visited India as President of the Indian National Congress, Government officials were forbidden to offer him hospitality, and the *dak* bungalows of the territories over which he had once ruled were closed to him. However, Surendranath Banerjea notes in his autobiography that there was a change for the better in the official attitude since 1906 when John Morley declared in the House of Commons that he saw no reason why anyone who took a cool and steady view of Indian Government should be frightened of the Congress. Thus reassured, improved feelings towards the national movement were in evidence during Lord Hardinge's administration. In 1911 Lord Hardinge received a Congress deputation which had been refused by Lord Curzon a few years previously, and in 1914 Lord Pentland visited the Congress in Madras.

Perhaps no single British administrator in India gave a greater impetus to the national movement

than Lord Curzon with his ill-disguised contempt for the Indian National Congress. The Congress which passed a resolution welcoming him to India on his arrival soon began to deplore the misfortune which sent him to this country. It was a misfortune that lasted longer than the usual Viceregal term of office and brought many trials and tribulations to Indian nationalism. Like everything else it had to end, but it left embittered feelings behind.

It was in a sense inevitable that British rule in India should have provoked discontent and 'sedition'. So long as Indians were allowed to admire English political institutions without being permitted to adopt them, like the English language, English dress and English ways of living, there was bound to be conflict. Pandit Madan Malaviya explained this in words which demand quotation: 'What is an Englishman without representative institutions? Why, not an Englishman at all, a mere sham, a base imitation, and I often wonder as I look round at our nominally English magnates, how they have the face to call themselves Englishmen and yet deny us representative institutions, and struggle to maintain despotic ones. Representative Institutions are as much a part of the true Briton as his language and his literature. . . . India has found a voice at last in this great Congress, and in it, and through it, we call on England to be true to her traditions, her instincts and herself, and grant us our rights as freeborn British citizens.'

This was in 1886. Today Pandit Malaviya and many others with him are not equally enamoured of British citizenship.

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CHAPTER II

SUCCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL AGITATION  
1904-1916

§ 1.—*Lord Curzon*

The Congress session of 1904 was the last public manifestation of the temper and spirit of the founders. Other forces were gaining ascendancy not only within the Congress but without. The moderate, almost academic, tone of its proceedings gave place to heat, bitterness and violence of language when it was found that its representations were usually ignored. Political demands were formerly put forward in the belief that the British people would concede them as soon as they were convinced of the fitness of Indians to govern themselves. Now they were claimed as a right, a birth-right of the Indian people which was withheld from them.

Events favoured the change. The ill-advised partition of Bengal, which was announced in 1905, gave Indians a shock such as had not been experienced for many decades. It stirred up violent nationalism not only in Bengal but elsewhere in the country. It furnished a test case and invited a trial of strength between what was universally regarded as the policy of 'divide and rule' and the resistance of public opinion. The reversal of the partition as a result of prolonged agitation was a

clear victory for Indian nationalism. The episode, however, gave birth to a number of minor movements such as anarchism and terrorism in Bengal and the Muslim League which to this day have tended, except for short periods, to detract from the universal authority of the Congress.

The cool insolence of Lord Curzon where things Indian were concerned was calculated to infuriate the lesser leaders everywhere. Surendranath Banerjea narrates how a deputation from the Indian Association waited upon His Excellency to present an address of welcome. While they were assembled in the throne room an aide-de-camp came in a few minutes before the Viceroy with a view to satisfying himself that the arrangements were in proper order. He noticed two members of the deputation wearing Indian pump-shoes and asked them to remove the shoes or retire from the deputation. They chose the latter course. The incident created a painful impression, writes Banerjea, who was the leader, and one or two other members wanted to follow those who had withdrawn; but it was considered to be discourteous to the head of the Government. Pocketing their pride they read the address of welcome.

Lord Curzon started well: one of his earliest speeches dwelt on his affection for India. 'I love India,' he said, 'its people, its history, its Government, the complexities of its civilization and life.' He had courage in abundance, particularly the courage required to defy public opinion. When he discovered that the military authorities had hushed up the crime of a gang of British soldiers who raped a Burmese beggar woman, his wrath fell on the whole circle of offenders. The

culprits were dismissed from the Army ; high military officers were severely censured and in certain cases relieved of their commands ; the regiment was banished to Aden ; the civil servants reprimanded ; and an Order in Council was issued to express ' profound horror and repugnance ' and to condemn ' the negligence and apathy that were displayed in responsible quarters '.

He loved the people in his own way which was not, however, one that could be generally appreciated. There was little that he did which did not cause Indians to pile up resentment not against individuals only but against the whole race, the entire regime. The embarrassments from which the Government suffered can be traced to his folly. It has been truly said that he could have been a great man if he could have forgotten that he was Lord Curzon.

Addressing Bengali students at the convocation of Calcutta University, he spoke of truth as western virtue, and suggested that Orientals, like the Cretans, were liars, and that they were given to flattery and other heinous sins. It was a blazing indiscretion, a thinly disguised insult. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* retorted the next day by reproducing an extract from *Problems of the Far East* by George N. Curzon, in which the author confessed that to make a good impression on the President of the Korean Foreign Office he gave a false age and when asked if he was related to the Queen of England, replied that he was as yet an unmarried man ; ' with which unscrupulous suggestion,' he wrote, ' I completely regained the old gentleman's favour.' Incidents such as these were not likely to endear the man or the regime he represented to the people.

Gokhale summed up Lord Curzon and the achievements of his administration in the course of his presidential address to the twenty-first Congress in 1905. 'For seven long years,' he said, 'all eyes had constantly to turn to one masterful figure in the land—now in admiration, now in astonishment, more often in anger and in pain till at last it has become difficult to realize that a change has really come. For a parallel to such an administration, we must, I think, go back to the times of Aurangzebe in the history of our own country. There we find the same attempt at a rule excessively centralized and intensely personal, the same strenuous purpose, the same overpowering consciousness of duty, the same marvellous capacity for work, the same sense of loneliness, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round. I think even the most devoted admirer of Lord Curzon cannot claim that he has strengthened the foundations of British rule in India . . . . . To him India was a country where the Englishman was to monopolize for all time all power, and talk all the while of duty. The Indian's only business was to be governed and it was a sacrilege on his part to have any other aspiration. In his scheme of things there was no room for the educated classes of the country ; and having failed to amuse them for any length of time by an empty show of taking them into his confidence he proceeded in the end to repress them. Even in his last farewell speech at the Byculla Club in Bombay, India exists only as a scene of the Englishman's labours, with the toiling millions of the country—eighty per cent of the population—in the back-



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ground. The remaining twenty per cent, for aught they are worth, might as well be gently swept into the sea !'

The Delhi Durbar provided an occasion for the officials to display their reaction to Curzon's 'efficiency' campaign, particularly the way in which he had punished a whole regiment for one of those frequent shooting accidents that were formerly hushed up. When the proposal to hold the Durbar was first made it became a subject of animated controversy. It was described as an act of uncalled for extravagance at a time when the country had not fully recovered from the effects of famine and there was still a large number of people in receipt of public relief. But Lord Curzon gave an assurance that the cost of the ceremonial 'will be immeasurably less than the dimensions which a too tropical imagination has allowed it to assume'. It was then pointed out that a mere dazzling pageant could not leave a permanent impression and that the Durbar should be consecrated by the touch of a higher statesmanship. A boon was asked in commemoration of the event just as during the Durbar of 1858 the Queen's Proclamation was made removing racial disabilities, and every subsequent ceremonial had been signalized by a substantial concession to the people. But no boon was granted. Not even a scheme of technical and scientific education, which J. N. Tata was willing to finance, would receive the Viceroy's support. Instead, that white elephant, the Victoria Memorial, was built, an idle show-place but in Curzon's magniloquent phrase, 'a snow-white fabric,' 'the Taj of the Twentieth Century'.

## § 2.—*The Gospel of Efficiency*

Evil forebodings for the future of India came in the form of university and municipal reform carried out under the plea of 'efficiency'. The Congress protested against these reactionary policies, and though it was Calcutta that was affected, the question became an All-India one. The devices of the officials to make local self-government a sham were exposed. To Calcutta they gave a 'Master-Servant' in the form of a nominated chairman who controlled everything and to Bombay they gave a 'Servant-Master', a municipal commissioner who acted as a paid secretary, but did not take his orders from his employers; on the contrary he once declined to produce the records of the Municipality for the inspection of the Municipality. Everywhere official control of local bodies was strengthened by increasing the number of nominated members, and in Poona there was a complaint that candidates rejected by the people were nominated by the Government.

It was, however, the Universities' Act and the preparation for it in defiance of public opinion that created bad feeling. In 1901 Lord Curzon held an educational conference at Simla to which only European educationists were invited. It was a secret conclave and about this very conference the Viceroy declared: 'Concealment has been no part of my policy since I have been in India, and the education of the people is assuredly the last subject to which I should think of applying such a canon.' Commenting on this, Surendranath Banerjea writes: 'The effrontery of it lay in the emphatic denunciation of secrecy at the

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very time, and in connexion with the very subject, in regard to which the speaker had made up his mind to violate the canon that he had so eloquently proclaimed.' It was an amusing divergence between profession and practice in one who had so greatly extolled the ethics of the west above the baser morality of the east.

The educational conference was followed by the appointment of a Universities' Commission which, however, did not contain a single Hindu member. The newspapers made a vigorous protest against the exclusion of the Hindu element, and as the result, a Hindu was appointed in the person of Justice Gurudas Bannerjee. The report, which was made in five months' time, suggested a retreat from the policy of the Education Commission of 1882. It recommended the abolition of the second-grade colleges, the abolition of the law classes and the fixing of a minimum rate of college fees by the Syndicate, which really meant the raising of the fees. The aim apparently was to increase the efficiency of higher education, and the method was restriction of its area. The hostility to Indian lawyers was not concealed. The abolition of the law classes in the colleges would increase the expense of legal education and diminish the number of lawyers, and about this result the commission said, 'We are not certain that this would be an unmixed evil'. The lawyers were then as now politically minded, and easily gave their services for political agitation. Gurudas Bannerjee recorded a vigorous minute of dissent in the report.

Upon its publication a great agitation was set up. The Congress passed a resolution objecting

strongly to the recommendations of the Commission whose object it was to officialize the Senate and Syndicate and thus convert the University into a department of the Government. The Government of India was forced, partially at any rate, to bend to the popular view. Second-grade colleges were not abolished ; though the law classes went, central law colleges in the Presidency towns were established and the Government did not insist unduly upon the minimum college fees.

The political excitement in Bengal during the early years of the century was closely bound up with Lord Curzon's policy which, combined with his off-hand methods of expressing his opinions, were unwittingly designed to unite extremists and moderates against the Government. His resumption of control over the Calcutta Municipality offended all who had taken part in local government ; and the University Act annoyed the educated classes and university teachers. But his greatest challenge was the partition of Bengal.

The agitation over this question, however, placed the Congress in a difficult position, for it brought Muslim and Hindu interests into sharp opposition. In 1890 nearly a quarter of the delegates were Muslims ; in 1905 there were only 17. In Bengal itself practical interests were affected by the creation of a new province in Eastern Bengal. The new province was predominantly Muslim in character, and this upset the Hindus very badly. The professional and commercial classes were irritated because the trade and prestige of Calcutta were now to be shared with Dacca, the new capital. Consequently the agitation against the partition found wide support, even

Rs. the support of the *Statesman* and the *Englishman*, and it became the principal feature of the national movement from 1905 to 1911, the year of its revocation.

### § 3.—*The Partition of Bengal*

It was in keeping with Curzon's character that though he tentatively sounded public opinion and met with resolute opposition to his project, he should nevertheless have carried it out with determination. His aim was to increase administrative efficiency by following up the separation of Assam in 1874 with the separation of some more districts, to form together with Assam a larger province. But he had not taken into consideration the growth of the feeling of Bengali unity which had been manifest to all who could observe intelligently.

This sprang from the intellectual renaissance which was the result of the impact on Bengali literature of the ideas of the west. Bengali literature, which was practically a closed book to Europeans, evoked a keen sense of local and national patriotism, a deep love for the land with its green fields, its mango groves and its clear blue skies. To the Government the partition was a measure designed to secure efficiency; to the Bengali it was an outrageous violation of unity. Curzon was deaf to protest and when the partition was actually made, it was regarded not only as a deliberate affront but as a Machiavellian device to defeat the national movement by splitting up the province which was playing the leading part. That the agitation should have been so boldly organized, so vehemently carried out indicated the absence of fear and the growing cynicism of the

people who had opportunities of watching with familiarity the doings of the Government in their midst.

As soon as the partition was announced leading Bengalis met in conference and sent a telegram to the Viceroy praying for a reconsideration of the orders passed and urging that if a partition was unavoidable, owing to administrative reasons, the Bengali-speaking population should form part and parcel of the same administration. This linguistic line of division was ultimately adopted in 1911, but Lord Curzon was not the man to accept suggestions from people who, he considered, had no right to differ from his views.

Surendranath Banerjea, who took a prominent part at this conference and others which followed, notes that since Lord Curzon was not to be influenced by public meetings, which he was known to treat with undisguised contempt, it was felt that something more was necessary, as an indication of the intense feeling that lay behind the whole movement. One suggestion was that every Indian holding honorary appointments such as those of honorary magistrates and membership of district boards and municipalities, should resign them. The objection, however, was that these appointments offered opportunities of serving the people and that they were a source of local influence which would be useful in the coming struggle. Besides there was a serious doubt whether the whole country would follow their example. A partial failure on the threshold of a great controversy was by no means to be courted and the idea was therefore abandoned.

Rs. This explains why the boycott movement was taken up and became immensely popular. It is not known who was the originator of the idea, nor is it necessary to make a long search for him. The boycott had played an important part in Irish history and it is sufficient to remember that the history of Great Britain and all her colonial and imperial ventures had been read and digested by at least two generations of educated Indians. No doubt Indians borrowed some of their political strategy from the nations which had successfully defied Britain. The successful boycott of American goods by the Chinese was a recent occurrence which had been noted and discussed by the newspapers. If the Government of India and the British Government were not prepared to listen to what Indians had to say, here evidently was the means of making them take notice. The boycott was supplemented by the *swadeshi* movement which sought to correct the industrial helplessness of the country. Boycott would help *swadeshi* and *swadeshi* would help boycott, and with these weapons, political and economic, the Bengalis, with public opinion supporting them throughout the land, sought the redress of their grievances.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the movement, in its origin at any rate, was not anti-British. There was some anxiety about its effect on the many Englishmen in Calcutta who strongly disapproved of the partition. Besides it was intended to appeal to the British public against the Government of India. After confidential consultations with English friends the Calcutta leaders put the following resolution to a mass meeting at the Town Hall and carried it with acclamation :



'That this meeting fully sympathizes with the resolution adopted at many meetings held in the mofussil to abstain from the purchase of British manufactures so long as the partition resolution is not withdrawn, as a protest against the indifference of the British public in regard to Indian affairs and the consequent disregard of Indian public opinion by the present Government.'

It should be noted that the boycott movement was intended to produce an effect upon the Government of India not directly but indirectly through its effect upon the British public. In its origin at any rate the boycott of British goods was a temporary measure, to be withdrawn as soon as a particular grievance was redressed. It was a bold and novel step for Indians to take and it confounded the Government of India. The *Englishman* thought that it would embitter the controversy if it was successful, and if it failed, would render the movement absurd. The *Statesman*, like the Government of India, was confronted with a situation without precedent, and treated it with ridicule in its accustomed manner. But the success which was soon attained revealed a tremendous volume of public sentiment that had not been dreamed of in connexion with so materialistic a controversy. In their amazement and unanticipated discomfiture the bureaucracy sought to repress where tactful handling and conciliatory measures would have been more effective, and its awkward policy only helped to spread and strengthen the movement.

It was the young student community which enthusiastically took up the propaganda as the young have always taken up with enthusiasm any new gospel preached with conviction in any country of the world, Greece, Italy, America or

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Germany. The students carried out the boycott thoroughly, with an astonishing attention to detail, even refusing, in one instance, to answer an examination on paper of foreign manufacture. Nor were the women less enthusiastic.

The success of *swadeshi* was due, apart from its connexion with the political issue of the partition, to the national awakening with which an industrial revival came to be closely connected. It was in spirit a protectionist movement which sought to create a natural preference in the mind of the Indian for goods made in his own country, even if they cost more than the imported goods of the same class. This was the only course of action open to a subject people who had no control over their tariff policy. Jogesh Chunder Chaudhuri, a member of the Calcutta bar, had interested himself over ten years previously in indigenous industries and had organized an exhibition of *swadeshi* goods as an annex to the Congress of 1896. A similar exhibition on a larger scale was again held under his management in connexion with the Calcutta Congress of 1906 and it was a striking success.

The official report of the Congress thus summarizes the achievement of the 'second ill-starred administration of Lord Curzon'. 'The Official Secrets Act was passed in the teeth of universal opposition. It was condemned by the whole press—Indian and Anglo-Indian—protests from all quarters poured in, but Lord Curzon was implacable, and the Gagging Act was passed. Education was crippled and mutilated; it was made expensive and it was officialized; and so that most effective instrument for the enslavement

of our national interest, the Indian Universities Act, was passed, and the policy of checking, if not altogether undoing the noble work of Bentinck, Macaulay and Lord Halifax, which for more than half a century has been continued with such happy results to the country, came in full swing.'

There was intense relief that the period of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty had come to a close, and Gokhale, delivering his presidential address, did not disguise it. He discussed the partition of Bengal and the boycott and *swadeshi* movements which had spread to other provinces. There was a resolution against the partition of Bengal carried amid shouts of '*Bande Mataram*'. Surendranath Banerjea, who moved it, declared that the Government was busy 'forging instruments of repression, laying the foundations of a reign of terror. Meetings were prohibited, processions stopped, the singing of '*Bande Mataram*' punished, boys prosecuted and sent to jail.' Pandit Malaviya moved the next resolution protesting against the repressive measures adopted to crush the antagonism that Lord Curzon's tyranny had created. Not one act of violence, he declared, had been committed by the people in spite of all that had occurred. No protest was heeded; on the contrary more extreme measures of repression followed. Lala Lajpat Rai urged all to show that 'we were no longer beggars, and that we are subjects of an Empire where people are struggling to achieve that position which is their right'.

The subject was more fully dealt with at the next session, which met at Calcutta. There was seating accommodation for 16,000 persons and standing room for 4,000. The session opened with prayers,

and the singing of national songs by choirs of young boys and girls. Dadabhai Naoroji took the chair, but he was too old and feeble to read his address to twenty thousand people ; so Gokhale read it for him. On the subject of agitation the Grand Old Man, drawing upon his experience of British politics, discussed his political strategy :

‘ Agitation is the life and soul of the whole political, social and industrial history of England. It is by agitation the English have accomplished their most glorious achievements, their prosperity, their liberties and, in short, their first place among the nations of the world. The whole life of England every day is all agitation. You do not open your paper in the morning but read from beginning to end it is all agitation—congresses and conferences, meetings and resolutions without end—for a thousand and one movements, local and national. From the Prime Minister to the humblest politician, his occupation is agitation for everything he wants to accomplish. The whole Parliament, press and platform is simply all agitation. Agitation is the civilized peaceful weapon of moral force, and infinitely preferable to brute physical force, when possible....Agitate ; agitate means inform. Inform, inform the Indian people what their rights are and how and why they should obtain them, and inform the British people of the rights of the Indian people, and why they should grant them. If we do not speak they say we are satisfied. If we speak we become agitators ! The Indian people are properly asked to act constitutionally, while the Government remains unconstitutional and despotic.’

The Congress passed resolutions on the partition of Bengal, asking for the annulment or modification of the partition to keep the Bengali-speaking community under one administration; declaring that the boycott movement was legitimate; and calling upon the people to promote *swadeshi*.

#### § 4.—*The Growth of Extremism*

The session of 1906 was important in another respect: it disclosed the growth within the Congress body of extreme opinion opposed to the severely constitutional methods of the older generation. Lajpat Rai exemplified the new attitude. 'We are perfectly justified', he declared, 'in trying to become arbiters of our own destiny and in trying to obtain freedom.' At the Calcutta Congress the two parties wrangled fiercely over the propriety of the boycott as a political weapon of universal application. But the older men looked upon the boycott movement and its connected activities as a temporary expedient, the adoption of which had been forced upon them; not as a normal method of political agitation. This was the beginning of differences which were shortly to split the Congress. However, at Calcutta, embarrassed as they were by the declaration of John Morley, then Secretary of State for India, that the partition must be accepted as a settled fact, the older men retained control of the situation, though they allowed the resolutions on self-government, national education, and the *swadeshi* and boycott movements and tolerated the heated tone of the speeches. This extremist tendency gladdened the heart of Tilak, who looked forward with

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renewed hope to capturing the Congress for his reactionary nationalism.

The outbreak of anarchism in Bengal occurred at this time. The policy of the Government in repressing the public expression of protest against the partition caused young Bengalis in their hopelessness to seek in violence the attainment of their ends. The Government ordered *swadeshi* workers and preachers to be prosecuted; public meetings in public places to be prohibited or dispersed; military police to be stationed in quiet centres of population, where without instigation they committed assaults upon peaceful citizens. The reply was the assassination of English residents. The most sensational case was the murder of two ladies at Muzaffarpur, and there was a time when murders were weekly occurrences. Many attempts, however, failed, like the plot to blow up Sir Andrew Fraser's train, but that did not decrease the tension.

On the Indian side expressions of horror at these outrages were not wanting, but the tendency among Englishmen was to regard them as insincere. The resentment and mutual contempt caused between the races during this period is a factor of great significance in the psychological explanation of the breach between India and England. Terrorism was the work mainly of students, a penalty that had to be paid for appealing to them to join active politics. With the annulment of the partition, political assassination became infrequent, though it has revived in recent years. It is a fact borne out by history that if legitimate means of expression are denied to people with a grievance they inevitably choose illegitimate means. From



this wave of anarchism, however, neither the Government nor Indian political leaders learned anything, for on subsequent occasions the same policy of repression was revived, to be followed by the same appeal to the emotions of the immature.

Another significant event of this period was the rise of Tilak. He was the leader of Maratha nationalism in Western India, and the protagonist of Hinduism against all foreign culture, be it Muslim or European. In the first flush of enthusiasm for western culture there had been a tendency among the English educated classes, following the attitude of their teachers, to run down everything Indian. There was a reaction in the form of a Hindu revival against this complacent confession of inferiority. In Bengal Ramakrishna Paramhansa and his follower Swami Vivekananda led a 'Back to the Vedas' movement based on the idea of a Hindu Golden Age and uncritical reverence for the sacred books. Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, foreigners all, awakened Hindus to the greatness of their heritage by praising the old Hindu civilization. The resounding victories of the Japanese over the Russians further helped Indians to rise in their own estimation. Japanese victories gave Indians renewed self-confidence; if Asiatics could beat Europeans with their own weapons, the puny nation of the Japanese battling at tremendous odds with the gigantic Russian Empire, what could not Indians do ?

Tilak rose on the wave of nationalism generated by events at home and abroad. To supply the young with objects of worship he founded the cult of Shivaji, the Maratha hero, who drove the Moguls



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out of the Deccan ; and his object was to recall the discomfiture of the Muslims and create discontent with British rule. He established anti-cow-killing societies to protect the favourite animal of the Hindus. His newspapers poured fire and brimstone on the British and missed no opportunity of stirring up ill feeling against the Government. He exploited religious emotion and turned it to political advantage, appealing to Hindu orthodoxy against the modernizing influence of the administration. The plague epidemic in Poona necessitated unpopular measures against which he directed a bitter attack because they infringed certain social conventions held sacred by the Hindus. For the same reason he opposed the Age of Consent Bill in 1890, which sought to raise the age of marriage. His imprisonment for a year following the murder of Rand and Ayerst, instead of ending his political career, gave him added prestige.

Tilak was a born journalist, an advocate of violent policies, with the genius for stirring up popular prejudices. In comparison with Gokhale he was a much lesser figure and abysmally inferior in statesmanship. But there was something in his extremist philosophy which appealed powerfully to the younger generation. He led the reaction against the threat of absorption into an alien civilization, against the danger of losing status as Indians for an indeterminate and subordinate position within the British Empire. He hindered the process of disintegration within Hinduism, believing that there was nothing else to take its place. He represented two incongruous forces : the Hindu reaction against western civilization and the impatience of the extreme nationalist

with the slow and cautious policy of the moderates. He was in religion a conservative, in politics a radical. His was an aggressive nationalism, more Hindu than Indian.

### § 5.—*The Congress Split*

Very soon Tilak took under his protection the left wing of the Congress. His rising influence was regarded with suspicion by the Congress leaders who, anticipating danger at Nagpur, crowded with his followers, changed the venue of the Congress to Surat in 1907. The left wing mustered strongly and the meeting, as it was bound to be, was a stormy one owing to the unavoidable antagonism between the right and left wings. It was a misfortune that the Congress assembled under the influence of strong rumours that the militant resolutions of the previous Congress, on self-government, boycott, *swadeshi* and national education were not to be put before the subjects committee. After the preliminary speeches Surendranath Banerjea rose to second the proposal that Rash Behari Ghose be elected president. But the left wing whose desire it was that Lala Lajpat Rai, just released after his deportation, should be president, created a tumult and the meeting had to be adjourned to the next day. On the morrow Tilak wished to propose an amendment regarding the presidential election, and as he was ruled out of order an argument ensued, shoes being thrown and sticks freely used. The police were called in to clear the hall.

The situation was, however, saved by the statesmanship of Gokhale, Pherozeshah Mehta, Wacha, Pandit Malaviya and others who summoned

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a national convention the next day to appoint a committee to draw up a constitution for the Congress. The constitution was drawn up a few months later at Allahabad, with rules for the conduct of meetings. Article I lays down what is known as the Congress creed. 'The objects of the Indian National Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of Government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire, and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members. These objects are to be achieved by constitutional means, by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration, and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and developing and organizing the intellectual, moral, economic and industrial resources of the country.'

The right wing adhered firmly to the conviction that membership of the Congress entailed the signature and acceptance of the Congress Creed, and turned down the overtures of the Tilakites who now realized their error, but too late. The left wing therefore remained outside the Congress till 1916. During its period of exile the left wing suffered in prestige from its connexion with the anarchical movement in Bengal and from the loss of some of its leaders through imprisonment and deportation. Nevertheless they did not lose hope. Among the younger men it was gaining influence, particularly in Bengal where impatience with the cautious policies of the right was not concealed. They relied upon the spiritual significance which they attached to their self-sacrifice, to help them to make an impression upon Hindu youth, whom

they drove by excited exhortations to free India from the domination of alien rulers and alien ideals.

Against the unrest generated by extremist propaganda the Government struck by means of the Seditious Meetings Act, the Press Act and the Explosives Act.

The Government of India was forced to use and is still under the necessity of using unhappy and vague formulas such as 'exciting hatred and contempt of the Government' or 'taking part in a conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty in British India'. Minto introduced an extra-legal method in the form of deportation without trial under a Regulation of 1818, a device well understood in India and habitually employed by certain princes. Most of the original deportees however had been Englishmen. Minto now arrested and deported Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh from the Punjab and detained a few Bengali leaders. Opposition to this extra-legal procedure arose in England from all parties and was expressed most noisily by F. E. Smith. This is astonishing, considering the views on India for which F. E. Smith, later Lord Birkenhead, was notorious; but it is an old and healthy English tradition, that the opposition should stand upon the letter of the law.

In spite of much provocation the Congress right wing held fast to its aim of realizing self-government within the Empire by constitutional means; but it moderated its enthusiasm for British ideas and institutions. Its demand was no more based upon the fact of British citizenship but upon the affirmation of the inherent right of the

Indian people to govern themselves. To that extent they had come under the influence of the left. The defect of the moderates was that they were overconfident of their strength as the result of being led by a few well-tried leaders; and they made no effort to secure fresh recruits. If Morley and the English Liberals had withdrawn their support the right wing would most certainly have collapsed and the Congress would have been captured by Tilak and his supporters much earlier than it actually was.

The right wing leaders had positive results to show in the first Indian appointments to the Council of India and to the Viceroy's Executive Council. the Morley-Minto reforms and the revocation in 1911 of the partition of Bengal—all of which were treated as proofs of the essential rightness of the methods of constitutional agitation favoured by them. It was the triumph of the ideals on which the Congress was founded in 1885. And for the future they foresaw the operation of similar ideals in similar circumstances. 'Hand in hand with the British people,' declared Wedderburn to the Congress of 1910, 'India can most safely take her first steps in the path of progress.'

#### § 6.—*The Morley-Minto Reforms*

Deep satisfaction was expressed by the Congress in 1908 with the Morley-Minto scheme of reforms, though Pandit Malaviya urged that it should be regarded only as an instalment of the desired change. At the next Congress a more critical attitude was in evidence, particularly in connexion with the regulations under the scheme which were condemned for having introduced

religion into politics and differentiated electorates by religious beliefs. Muslims were given separate electorates and were allowed to vote as well in the general electorates, while the Hindu minorities in the Punjab and Assam enjoyed no such privilege. Further a Muslim who paid an income tax on Rs. 3,000 a year had a vote, while the non-Muslim had none. Muslim graduates of five years' standing had a vote; but the non-Muslim graduate had none. This discrimination between Hindus and Muslims, introduced for the first time, caused dissatisfaction.

The Muslim agitation for the consideration of their claim for special protection, which was generously recognized by the Morley-Minto Reforms, had a somewhat complicated history. Owing to the caste system the Muslim population of India was not absorbed into Hindu society; but until the establishment of British rule this was compensated by the fact that over the greater area of the country they were the rulers. However they gradually lost their prerogatives; Persian ceased to be the official language and consequently the public services were closed to them. The catastrophe of the Mutiny was ascribed to their evil machinations, and with the fall of the phantom sovereignty of the Mogul Emperor, their noble families decayed or dispersed. Unfortunately, from a mistaken loyalty to Islam, the Maulvis forbade western learning to their followers and Muslims were thus excluded from the liberal professions. Consequently while others were rising intellectually and socially, Muslims all over India were in a state of moral and material decay.

In these circumstances Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan started a movement to reform the Muslim community, and to reconstruct their outlook on life. He denounced superstition, and urged his people to take to western learning, which he held was not contrary to the teaching of Islam. When the Congress began to criticize the Government and demand representative institutions he warned Muslims of the communal dangers that lay ahead. He desired union and friendship with Hindus, but the social and religious differences between the two great communities were too deep for easy reconciliation. When the agitation for political reform gained strength the Muslims impressed upon the Viceroy the necessity for separate electorates, whether in provincial legislatures, municipalities or district boards. Lord Minto accepted the principle. Abandoning their aloofness from popular politics, Muslims founded the All-India Muslim League in 1906, and from this date they appeared on the political scene as an organized political party.

Individual Muslims had belonged to the Congress previously and continued to attend its sessions afterwards, but they have not been representative of their community. The partition of Bengal and the agitation which was raised by Hindus for its revocation was a sad blow to many Muslims who became convinced now of the existence of an unbridgeable gulf between the two communities. The Morley-Minto Reforms reassured them, and the Muslim League thenceforth laid special emphasis upon two points they deemed essential, namely, that Muslims should have the right of electing their own representatives by



means of special electorates and that the number of seats allotted to them should be in excess of their ratio to the general population.

These claims were contested by Hindus, but the Government of India, the Secretary of State and the House of Commons readily accepted them. Where separate electorates had been tried in municipalities, they had worked well and had prevented disturbances during elections. It was considered probable that if separate representation was not conceded there would be a high frequency of communal riots and Muslims would find it impossible to obtain seats in the legislatures of provinces where they did not command a majority. Their demand for representation in excess of their ratio to the population was admitted because their influence was held to be greater than was showed by their numbers. They owned much landed property, they formed a large element in the public services and they contributed a large proportion of soldiers to the Indian Army. Moreover, their geographical distribution placed them in the position of guardians of the land routes to India.

The fact that their claims were recognized without the show of indifference and procrastination which was usual in the dealings of the Government with the Congress was interpreted in Hindu circles as the very obvious policy of an imperialist power in a country such as India, divide and rule. While the Congress worked for national unity here was the Government successfully defeating its objective by the concession of separate electorates to Muslims. While the representation of Muslim interests on political bodies was effectively secured, it cannot be said that communal riots were avoided.

As a matter of fact the keen rivalries that have been promoted both inside and outside the self-governing bodies have increased the number of riots and casualties and widened the area of their incidence. At various times attempts were made to arrive at a satisfactory arrangement by which the demands of Muslims for the protection of their interest might be secured without the necessity of separate political representation, but the precedent set by the Morley-Minto Reforms were the perennial stumbling block. Subsequent political schemes such as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the current White Paper scheme have accepted this arrangement as a settled fact, chiefly because of the adamant resistance put forth by Muslims against a change in the terms of political representation which they enjoyed. The Anglo-Indian Press was never helpful, and was accustomed at any time to grow suspicious of any *rapprochement* between the two communities, believing that their union would be a union against the Government.

#### § 7.—*Indians Abroad*

It has been remarked that with the development of communications and the growth of English education a spirit of Indian nationality had been promoted. An important sign of awakened national pride was the interest taken by the Congress on behalf of the Indian people as a whole in the condition of Indians abroad. No country welcomed Indians except as semi-servile workers and in 1901 there were  $2\frac{1}{2}$  millions of them. The indenture system on which most of these emigrated was full of abuses and the agitation set up by the Congress even in its early years resulted first

in the modification of the system and then in its abolition in 1917. The emigration of indentured labour to Natal was stopped in 1910. There were many points in dispute between Indians and the white population of South Africa from 1895 onwards. In that year the Natal Government imposed a tax of £3 on all Indians who remained in the country and would not reindenture. Mr. Gandhi who was then on a visit to the colony was struck by the injustice of the imposition and led an agitation. There were many ups and downs in the fortunes of Indian settlers in the South African colonies ; but Mr. Gandhi made it a point to establish the right of Indians to fair consideration by organizing during the Boer War an Indian Ambulance Corps which took part in the relief of Ladysmith. Nevertheless the experience of Indians abroad, not only in South and East Africa but also in other British colonies, was a challenge to Indian nationality. People felt that their status as British subjects was no guarantee of fair or equal treatment in the British Empire. It was common for them to meet not only with indifference and contempt but even with insults and violence.

As far back as 1894 the Congress passed a resolution entreating Her Majesty's Government to grant 'the prayer of Indian subjects resident in the South African colonies, by vetoing the Bill of the Colonial Government disenfranchising them'. This was repeated next year, and emphatic protests were made when the proposed legislation was passed. It protested again when the decisions of the Transvaal High Court restricting Indians to 'locations' became known. At the end of the Boer

War it was hoped that the incorporation of the Boer Republics in the British Empire would end the grievances of Indians in South Africa ; but if the hope had been entertained seriously it was doomed to disappointment. The Congress expressed its sympathy with the passive resistance organized by Mr. Gandhi and drew the attention of the Government to the status of British Indians which was then under the consideration of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with a view to official representations being made for the guarantee of just and equitable conditions for Indian settlers.

There was cause for complaint that the imperialistic spirit of the British colonies was imposing disabilities additional to those that the Boers had imposed and it was pointed out that in return for the help given by the Indian settlers during the Boer War common gratitude required that they should be secured liberal treatment. Nevertheless Indians continued throughout the British Empire to be regarded as members of a backward and uncivilized race. The Congress keenly resented as an injustice the inferior status which Indians everywhere were compelled to accept and it demanded that their theoretical status as subjects of the King-Emperor should be practically honoured. It demanded that the colonies should not be enabled to secure Indian immigrants unless they guaranteed equitable and honourable terms. It was recalled that one of the declared causes of the Boer War was the treatment meted out to Indian subjects of the King-Emperor by the Government of the Republic. But the Government of India could not make an impression on the authorities concerned. The situation was

complicated by the fact that the Dominion of South Africa enjoyed internal autonomy and that Great Britain could do little more than offer advice in regard to the colour question. Mrs. Besant who spoke on the subject at the 1914 Congress gave it as her view that the attempt should not be made to limit the autonomy of the Colonies as India was claiming a similar right. But retaliatory measures were frankly discussed and recommended, such as the exclusion of Natal coal and of Australian imports. India was growing in the sense of her own dignity. It protested against indentured labour, against the monopolization of the vast colonial territories for European settlement only. It encouraged Mr. Gandhi and his associates in their struggle in South Africa. It is worth noting that the Gandhi-Smuts agreement was signed in 1914 and indentured labour abolished in 1916. The struggle, however, was not ended.

#### § 8.—*The Great War*

At the outbreak of the Great War the Congress position was that India should be given self-government ; but as Bhupendranath Basu declared, separation from England was not desirable, nor was subordination ; what was ardently desired was 'a joint partnership on equal terms'. But for the time being the constitutional demand was forgotten in the anxiety to express the loyalty of India to the throne and the determination to fight with Britain side by side in the struggle against Germany. Pride was felt by Indians that they were called upon to defend the Empire in time of peril. Men and women who had any

influence in public affairs, including Mr. Gandhi at one time, exerted their energies for the collection of funds or the recruitment of soldiers. The Congress might have taken this chance offered by the preoccupation of the Empire with a great war to strike a blow for liberty. But such a policy was ruled out unanimously as dishonourable. The Germans who had expected an Indian rebellion during the war were sadly disappointed. The loyalty of the people to the regime, unsatisfactory as it was, proclaimed itself in every sphere of activity as an intense, universal, and single-minded devotion to the success of British arms. Even Mr. Gandhi, who had just returned to India from a public career of profession and practice in non-violence, was constrained by the state of emergency to 'do his bit' in Gujerat, where he helped to enlist the peasants.

An event of great national importance occurred in 1916 when the celebrated Lucknow Pact was signed and ratified almost simultaneously by the Congress and the Muslim League. Though Muslims had obtained special minority representation, they were as keenly interested in national self-government as Hindus, and since 1913 their leaders had begun to express the hope of being able to meet Hindus periodically to find a *modus operandi* for concerted action in questions of public importance. According to this scheme Muslims were to be represented through special electorates on the provincial legislatures in the following proportions: Punjab, 50%; the United Provinces, 30%; Bengal, 40%; Bihar, 25%; the Central Provinces, 15%; Madras, 15%; and Bombay, 33.3 % of the Indian elected members.

The Lucknow Pact introduced a period of exceptional interest in the political history of recent times. The co-operation of Hindus and Muslims for the attainment of a common political objective caused rapid progress in the evolution of Indian political demands. But this understanding was not destined to last very long.



## CHAPTER III

### FAILURE OF MASS ACTION

1916-1934

#### § 1.—*Tilak*

The defeat of the left wing at Surat had left the right wing in complete possession and control of the Congress. At the outbreak of the Great War the party of Tilak was in disgrace and its influence on the Congress was negligible. True it is the attendance at the annual meeting fell off considerably ; at Calcutta in 1906 more than 20,000 persons had been present, of whom 1,663 were delegates ; the number of delegates declined to 243 in 1909 and to 207 in 1912 ; but there was a recovery in 1914, when 866 were present. The death of Gokhale in 1915 left the Congress without a commanding personality to direct its policy, and it was inevitable that Tilak, who had been struggling for years to obtain control, should succeed.

Gokhale's genius was constructive, evolutionary rather than revolutionary ; he counselled caution where the extremists demanded aggressive tactics. He desired that India should assimilate and consolidate whatever instalment of political reform was vouchsafed before the demand for the next instalment was formulated. He was mindful of the material benefits British rule had conferred

upon India, though he was not overmuch in love with the bureaucracy. He hoped that by removing the defects of Indian society, the country could be prepared for the blessing and burden of self-government. All his hopes were based upon compulsory education, which would remove the greatest handicap to all progress, political, social or economic—the handicap of illiteracy. But the objections which were successfully raised in his day, mainly financial, have persisted to our time. Gokhale, like Mr. Gandhi, was more fitted to lead social reform than to mix himself up with politics. This is not to say that he had no political genius or that he did not leave an impress on his countrymen. But his activities in connexion with the Servants of India Society showed where his sympathies really lay. Yet large as was his influence with the Government and his prestige in the country, his views could not appeal to younger men whose impatience with the 'constitutional' character of his political method was profound.

On the death of Gokhale Tilak became the leader of Indian nationalism. By forming an alliance with Mrs. Annie Besant, he doubled his influence. The Home Rule movement, which they jointly organized, drove the right wing completely out of the Congress, to form liberal federations and other moderate political associations. Mrs. Besant's intention was, however, to unite the two wings rather than to sow the seeds of dissension in the Congress. With the practised eye of the trained British politician, with experience of numberless controversies and agitations, she perceived in the gratitude felt in England for the help rendered by India from the earliest stages

of the war, the excellent opportunity of convincing the British people of the justice as well as the necessity for an immediate constitutional advance. Her scheme did not find favour with the Congress right wing in 1915, but with the death of Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta, the opposition weakened. There was, moreover, the growing fear even in the right wing that the scheme of Imperial federation, at that time a familiar subject of discussion, might result in the subordination of India not only to Britain but also to the British Dominions, including the irritating Dominion of South Africa.

The change to the left was prominent at the Congress meeting of 1916 at Lucknow. On this occasion the Muslim League joined with the Congress for the first time, and supported a campaign for Home Rule based upon an agreed minimum of constitutional advance. All were taken by surprise, including the Government of India and the British Government, for the unanimity of Hindus and Muslims in their joint demand for Home Rule was altogether new. Between Delhi and Whitehall there was already a correspondence in progress over the next step in political reform. This session of the Congress was followed by popular excitement provoked by innumerable lectures, meetings and discussions. It soon attained such a widespread character that the Government of India thought it time to intervene, and Mrs. Besant was interned. This gave her a tremendous popularity with the politically-minded classes and led inevitably to her election as President of the Congress in 1917. During these disturbances the right wing lost their position, and

not even the famous declaration of Edwin Montagu in August 1917 could help them to retrieve it.

Under more favourable conditions, this victory for constitutional methods would have secured the predominance of the right wing. The division between the two parties in the Congress was, however, completed by the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of political reform in 1918. While the right wing accepted it gratefully and declared it to be a substantial measure of responsible government to be worked and improved in the working, the left wing pronounced it to be disappointing and unacceptable. At the Congress of 1918 the right wing refused to participate and proceeded to set up Liberal Leagues in opposition to the Congress organization. Consequently at the Delhi meeting of the Congress the left wing had an undisputed control, and their views were pressed with characteristic confidence, self-assertion and lack of compromise. The right of India to immediate Home Rule was boldly asserted. Even Mrs. Besant who had started the Home Rule agitation was alarmed by the extremism of the extremists, and shortly withdrew to form a National Home Rule League to attain more moderate ambitions. The Muslim League was similarly disposed to withdraw, and the extremists, in charge of the Congress, committed themselves to the condemnation of the scheme for the reformed constitution.

### § 2.—*The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms*

From the declaration of August 1917 the preoccupation of the Congress was with constitutional questions. From time to time the condition

of the masses, the state of Indian industry, the backwardness of the depressed classes or the status of Indians abroad formed the subject of resolutions and were dealt with in presidential addresses. For a long period the resolution on the separation of judicial and executive functions was a hardy annual. But the interest of Congressmen and all their organized effort were devoted to the cause of political change. They deferred other issues to a time when they should be in a position to make their own laws. Congress propaganda in the country gave attention to what the Congress would do under Swaraj; but that was as far as it got.

Moreover events occurred in rapid succession which demanded not so much discussion and unanimous voting on resolutions in plenary Congress sessions but, in the view of leaders, the organization of mass action throughout the country. Since the object was to displace or to paralyze the Government, the organization of civil resistance consumed all the energy of Congressmen. The interest therefore shifts from debate and discussion within the Congress to the organization of opposition in the country. We have no more a mere 'Native Parliament'; we have rather a national army in the field against the police. The periods of peace between various movements provided rest and recuperation from one campaign and preparation for another. The civil disobedience campaigns of 1930 to 1932 were military campaigns though they were waged without lethal weapons.

To the Congress the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms presented a number of defects. The main

reforms related to the provincial Governments. In the provincial legislatures an elected majority was allowed, but it was foreseen that where really important legislation was concerned, dependence upon the provincial Governor, the Viceroy and the Secretary of State was secured. British interests did not propose to allow Indians to manage their affairs wholly as they liked. The division of subjects into 'reserved' and 'transferred' confirmed this suspicion. The transferred subjects were non-controversial and by passing laws on these Indians would not secure the control they desired over the administration. For the reserved subjects the Governor of the province and his Executive Council were not answerable to the Legislative Council but would be responsible to the British Parliament. If there was any legislative interference in this connexion the power of certification secured the independence of the Governor. At the Centre neither the Legislative Assembly nor the Council of State, the former with an elected majority and the latter without was expected to make an impression upon legislation except in minor cases. For instance in really vital matters such as the budget and the army, on which Indians held strong views, there was no control. The Secretary of State would continue to rule India through the Viceroy, and the Viceroy through the Provincial Governors. The British hold in India would persist even though arrangements were made for Indians participating in their own government. It was laid down that more Indians should find places in the Viceroy's Executive Council, but that alone could not satisfy nationalist opinion. Racial bars to appointments

in the public services were now abolished and simultaneous examinations in India and in England for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service were introduced. Ten years after the first meeting of the new legislative bodies a Commission was to be appointed to review the constitutional position both as regards the Government of India and the Provinces.

If we consider the hopes entertained by the political classes this scheme of reform indubitably conferred the shadow without the substance. What had been hoped was that the Government of India would be made responsible to the Indian people. Not only was there no prospect of this in the near future but the Reforms were tainted in Congress eyes by the confirmation of communal electorates. The old principle of 'divide and rule' was applied to reserved and transferred subjects as well as to the people at large who were to elect their representatives by communal labels. The franchise was a narrow one. There was, furthermore, the fear that the lack of control on the budget and on fiscal and financial policy would not enable Indians to develop the economic and industrial potentialities of the country.

The growth of the *swadeshi* movement during the partition controversy was the result not only of political but of economic consciousness, a consciousness of inferiority. 'India's fiscal policy is determined', wrote an Indian economist, 'by the interest of foreign producers abroad; her currency is trifled with and experimented upon without reference to her interest; her borrowings are not for industrial development; the resources of the Government are not pledged for attracting



capital on reasonable terms ; and profits which, if they remained within the country, would fertilize and multiply the means of prosperity, are drawn away to be enjoyed by absentee shareholders abroad, leaving the people denuded of the means of expansion and development.' The commercial classes had been growing restive under free trade, and Lord Hardinge, convinced that the poverty of India was due to the lack of a balance between agriculture and industry, had recommended the development of the latter. There was also the growing unemployment of the educated youth of the country who, having no scope in Government service and finding for themselves no place in the economic scheme of the country, were discontented and easily led into anti-Government activities. It was feared that the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, insisting as it did upon responsibility to the British Parliament, would only confirm the position of India as a country serving British economic interests, and of Indians in the Executive or Legislatures as agents of British commercial exploiters.

The real problem consisted, as an Indian publicist put it, in the transference of political power and responsibility from the people of England to the people of India. The Montagu-Chelmsford scheme did not, in the opinion of the Congress, now a left wing organization, tackle the problem at all. The Congress claimed that neither the British voter nor the British member of Parliament knew or cared about India, and that in actual practice the sovereignty of the British Parliament was translated into the rule of the India Office. The only interest the British people took in India was

to make it a party question at election time, and their party leaders could not resist the temptation to interfere sometimes with disastrous result. This was illustrated a few years later by the decision of Lord Birkenhead, against wiser counsels, to restrict the composition of the Simon Commission to Englishmen. The authority of the British Parliament in Indian affairs was established in order to provide a champion for Indian liberties when Indians were not in a position to defend them against the bureaucracy ; but it was on the whole an ignorant champion. Indian affairs occupied only one day in the year in the British Parliament. There have been sessions when there was no time even for this one day's discussion on Indian affairs.

### § 3.—*The Rowlatt Act*

While the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme had created an atmosphere of doubt and despondency a series of events occurred which made British protestations of sincerity to India sound hollow. The Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre strengthened the hold of the Congress.

The troubles against which these extraordinary measures were directed had their origin in the violent discontent created by the refusal of British Columbia to admit Indian immigrants in 1914. In May of that year the *Komagata Maru* with 351 Sikhs and 2 Punjabi Muslims on board reached Vancouver, from where the ship was driven away by force by the British Columbian authorities. These unsuccessful emigrants were landed in Bengal, filled with the injustice of the discrimination against them, when their own country admitted people of all foreign nationalities. Refusing a

special train to the Punjab, they marched on Calcutta but were scattered by the Police and hunted down and arrested. Another band of Indians from Manila, Hongkong, Shanghai and America reached India at about the same time. Their ire was roused against the British Government which, while pressing them to enlist to fight a desperate war, would not admit them into its own colonial territory. There was a *ghadr* (mutiny) conspiracy hatched by these disappointed men, which developed into a dangerous movement. It was, however, suppressed under the Defence of India Act.

In spite of this evil reputation the Punjab had a glorious war record. Many Indian lives had been lost, and most of the loss was felt in the Punjab. It irked the Muslims to fight against their co-religionists, the Turks. They fought against them nevertheless, but in India these unhappy circumstances gave rise to a revolutionary movement. The Government appointed a committee under Mr. Justice Rowlatt to consider the movement and to suggest measures against it. It should be remembered that in India 'revolutionary crime', 'anarchist', 'sedition' and other terms frequently used by Government officials are vague and ill defined. 'Sedition' for instance is defined as 'exciting disaffection against the Crown or the Government'. It has been pointed out as contrasting Indian with British politics, that the entire policy of the opposition parties in England for centuries has been to bring the Government into hatred and contempt. Already the Defence of India Act had been used in some provinces to suppress ordinary manifestations of

political activity. In the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee the people saw an attempt to continue indefinitely the restrictions which had been imposed under the stress of war conditions. Fears were not allayed by the fact that the Committee conducted its deliberations *in camera* and the material submitted to it consisted mostly of secret police records.

The recommendations of the Committee were embodied in an Act which was passed in spite of public protests. Under its provisions, people could be tried by courts which were empowered to sit *in camera*, and which could accept in certain circumstances the recorded statements of persons dead or missing—or otherwise incapable of giving evidence which could be subjected to the test of cross-examination. The judgment of these tribunals would be conclusive. People could be sent to the gallows under this procedure or could be transported for life. It also provided the Executive with authority to search without warrant and to arrest and confine persons without trial almost indefinitely.

It was inevitable that in the temper in which the people found themselves at this time the Rowlatt proposals would meet with resolute opposition. The Government of India paid no attention to the warnings of its Indian advisers, and trouble started almost immediately. It was, however, confined to the Punjab, and the Government, in an attempt to suppress it by force, proclaimed martial law in Lahore and Amritsar. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre sent a shock of horror throughout the length and breadth of India, and gave an impetus to the forces of nationalism

to organize themselves against a civilized Government which considered such a massacre as necessary to its maintenance. The Government of India maintained complete silence with regard to the incident and others which took place during those disturbed weeks. When details leaked out gradually there was an outcry for a public inquiry and the Hunter Committee was appointed. It did not start work until six months later and its Report was published in May 1920, a year after the tragedy.

The Indian National Congress, anticipating an official whitewash of the affair, took upon itself the task of investigation. A committee was appointed, consisting of C. R. Das, Abbas Tyabji, Mr. M. R. Jayakar and Mr. Gandhi; and their report was speedily published. The horrible details of the Jallianwalla Bagh incident were gone into thoroughly. General Dyer's errors were pointed out and discussed one by one. He had taken no measures to prevent the meeting at Jallianwalla which, under the terms of his proclamation, had been forbidden. With his troops and armoured cars he had occupied the only exit from the gardens, which thus became a terrible deathtrap for the people assembled there. He gave the order to fire without warning the crowd and instructed his men to fire wherever the crowd was thickest. In his evidence to the Hunter Committee General Dyer admitted that the firing was brought to an end because the ammunition was exhausted and that he would have used his machine-guns had he been able to move the armoured cars into the lane. In the course of ten fatal and fateful minutes 1,650 rounds were fired, causing

1,137 serious casualties and 379 deaths. When this was accomplished the troops were marched back to their quarters. No attempt was made to attend to the wounded or to send ambulances, because this was not his 'job'. Since the civil power had abdicated, and the curfew order was in force, preventing assistance from relatives and friends, the wounded were left in terrible agony.

The Congress Report did not mince matters. The administration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, was strongly criticized. The introduction of martial law was condemned, and reference in strong terms was made to the action taken under the law by particular officers. The action of General Dyer was characterized as 'a calculated piece of inhumanity unparalleled for its ferocity in the history of modern British administration'. Such orders as the 'Crawling Order', by which Indians were to crawl through a street where a European lady had been unnecessarily insulted, were condemned, and the Report demanded the recall of the Viceroy and the dismissal of the various officials whose conduct was held to be wrong.

The Hunter Committee held its meeting in public and the evidence given to it was reported in the press and stirred public feeling wherever it was read. The revelations of individual acts of official harshness and improper conduct came as an added shock to public opinion. The Report, when it materialized, was not unanimous; the Europeans signed the majority and the Indians signed the minority Report. The majority Report was an inauspicious attempt to excuse General Dyer, and this was shown up by the minority

Report. The attempt to explain away and to find acceptable excuses for actions which seemed to be inexcusable made the censure passed by the British Government, when the report went to it finally, appear inadequate in Indian eyes to the enormity of the crime perpetrated in its name.

#### § 4.—*Non-Co-Operation*

The non-co-operation movement was the outcome of a number of factors, one of which was the refusal of the House of Lords to endorse the censure of General Dyer contained in the Hunter Commission's Report and the dispatch of the Government of India thereon. It appeared to the Congress as a proof of the continuance of the traditional British attitude towards India. If this was so, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms could not be treated as an earnest attempt to carry out the spirit of the declaration of August 1917. Already the enactment of the Rowlatt Bill simultaneously with the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms had persuaded the Congress that the British Government was insincere. It was a contradiction between profession and practice which was not lost upon the politicians. The intransigence of the House of Lords with regard to General Dyer confirmed their worst suspicions.

It must be remembered that the war had lowered the prestige of Europe in the East generally and specially in India. The idea that Indians were incompetent, supposed to be sedulously fostered by the British, was disproved during the war by Indian soldiers at the Front and by Indians who replaced British officials in India without a material difference in Governmental



‘efficiency’. At the end of the war, however, these men were gradually ousted and placed again in subordination. Throughout India there were other inconveniences and restraints placed by war measures and the strain imposed by war effort. There were also the hardships of high prices. Subsequently famine, epidemic, influenza, a new stringent Income Tax Act—all these had contributed to the discontent which ultimately found vent in the non-co-operation movement.

Strength was added to the movement by the Khilafat agitation. Indian Muslims had fought against the Turks with gallantry but they had little joy in the defeat of their Muslim brethren ; and they trusted that after a suitable defeat the Turkish Sultan would be restored to his dominions. The sympathy felt by Indian Muslims for their co-religionists in Turkey and specially for their Caliph was expressed in many requests that the terms of peace with Turkey might be light. There were religious, emotional and cultural affinities, and these were the fundamental reasons for the Khilafat movement whose object was to restore the headship of Islam to the Sultan of Turkey. In deference to Muslim sentiment the Government of India protested against the harsh terms imposed upon Turkey by the Treaty of Sevres, but the Allies at Paris went on with their mandate policy with regard to Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Having failed completely in their mission to England for the moderation of the Turkish peace terms, Mahomed Ali and his brother Shaukat Ali returned to India to preach the *hijrat* movement. Thousands of Muslims took part in this exodus towards Afghanistan, only to be turned back after having

experienced all the hardships of the journey. The property which they had sold prior to their departure for trivial sums was now in the hands of others.

At this stage the Khilafat movement and the Congress joined forces under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi who, from this time onwards, played a dominating role in the Indian national movement and assumed a virtual dictatorship of the Congress. Having won his battles in South Africa against the Boers, Mr. Gandhi had returned to India in 1914; but in spite of his promise to Gokhale not to take an active part in politics until he had travelled in India for a year, he was embarrassed by the spontaneous homage of enthusiastic crowds who recognized in him the attributes of another *avatar*.

Mr. Gandhi's influence over the people, of every class and community, is something unique in the country's history. No single person has successfully established so universal an influence, and though many have disagreed with his views as a politician, they have paid him his due tribute as a man. To the masses his voluntary poverty and asceticism appealed irresistibly. India is a land where spiritual values still have some influence on judgement. Mr. Gandhi appeared to the multitude as a man of great spiritual strength. His South African reputation, the glamour of his various 'experiments with truth' and above all his forceful personality which attracted to him all who came in close contact, acted like magic. He had many defects; for instance he exalted the inner voice of his subconscious judgement to divine inspiration and guidance. He had no use for history or economics. But his entire outlook

on life was so refreshingly different, and yet so utterly Indian that his appeal struck an answering chord in the hearts of the people.

His gospel was not an easy one to follow. Into politics he introduced *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, two great principles which are distinctive of his political method. He insisted upon the vow to hold to the truth no matter what the cost—a contrast to Tilak who looked upon politics very much as war, in which, as in love, all things are said to be fair. And he demanded *ahimsa* of his followers, non-violence. It was a strait and narrow path from which many slipped, as they were bound to from inexperience or in the excitement of battle. But Mr. Gandhi held fast to his method even when he was most misunderstood, and he holds to it still. In *satyagraha* he presented the rising generation with a new hope, an open road and an infallible remedy for most ills of life. It armed that generation with an indestructible and matchless force which anyone could wield with impunity. It must be admitted, however, that under the circumstances in which he found the Indian masses, with an absence of military tradition and wholly unorganized for political action, passive resistance and non-violence were indispensable to the successful prosecution of national aims. For not only was it unthinkable that the Indian people could embark with success upon a campaign which had as its object a change in the Government in the traditional manner, accompanied by disorder and bloodshed, but success, should it ever come to such a revolution, would not be worth having, as it would provide undoubtedly the incentive to future revolutions.

Mr. Gandhi had found his principles successful in South Africa; but there the Indian settlers were not only suffering from a sense of grievance but were willing to put themselves under discipline to attain their common objects. But in India the masses had to be awakened first and then organized for the struggle. Theirs were vague amorphous grievances, for the social and economic ills from which they suffered were many. Now Mr. Gandhi, with the Congress to back him, conducted the political education of the masses. In appealing to the masses to take part in a political struggle, he was introducing an innovation from which the boldest national leaders had withdrawn in the past. It was a Democratic State Mr. Gandhi wanted to build in India, not the replacement of a British bureaucracy by an Indian bureaucracy with probably less virtues and more vices. Mr. Gandhi could not be charged with seeking the interest of a 'microscopic minority', for every campaign that he embarked upon had a justification in the interest of the 'dumb millions' of India, whose champion he constituted himself. It is in this respect that he differs from all the Congress leaders who went before him. He made politics the talk not only of the town but of the village; not only the occupation of the educated or the leisured classes, but of the cultivator and the artisan. In his movement everybody was welcome, be he a Brahmin, a Sudra or an untouchable. It is the universality of Mr. Gandhi which is the secret of his greatness.

The Congress had functioned without the luxury of a constitution till the Surat commotion of 1907. After this trouble Pherozeshah Mehta

and other members of the right wing had a constitution written down and passed at the next Congress session in order to avoid future disputes, and even the rules of procedure were minutely laid down. It was henceforward compulsory for every member to sign the Congress 'creed', which laid emphasis upon 'constitutional methods' of political change. Mr. Gandhi now changed this to 'peaceful and non-violent' methods at the Nagpur Congress. He also revised and largely rewrote the Constitution. His most important innovation was the compulsory use of *khaddar* by Congressmen, and the white homespun became the uniform of the national movement throughout India. In addition to this, he insisted that every Congressman should spin daily, and an annual quota of yarn for each member of the Congress was laid down. There were, however, objections from persons with a modernized outlook on life, who failed to appreciate the national or individual advantage of a daily course of yarn-spinning. Such men withdrew from the Congress, lightening it from a potential burden of hypocrisy and complacent make-believe. The spinning franchise was however, later withdrawn, to be replaced by a four-anna franchise. This made it possible for the non-spinners to return to the Congress fold, and at the same time did not exclude the poorer classes from the national movement. Mr. Gandhi also formed linguistic provinces for the purpose of territorial organization, discarding the previous arrangements, which followed the provincial boundaries fixed by the Government.

His campaigns of political education in the country were no less directed against the Govern-

ment. He pointed to the Government as the one cause of all the difficulties of the people. For instance his first attempt was in Kaira district of Gujerat. There had been a partial failure of the rains over the whole district and in accordance with the existing law and custom the revenue authorities had made estimates of the outturn of the crops for the purpose of the degree of relief to be allowed to the cultivators. Political organizations headed by Mr. Gandhi challenged the estimates as harsh and the relief as inadequate. Mr. Gandhi maintained that it was clear that the Government was harsh and tyrannical and he encouraged the peasants to enter upon a campaign of resistance. Though it was comparatively a failure it was a novel experiment which brought Mr. Gandhi and his teaching to public notice. This was in 1918.

When the Rowlatt Bills were under discussion Mr. Gandhi published a manifesto solemnly affirming that in the event of 'the bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a Committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property'. The masses whom he addressed were not, however, ready for non-violence. When he proclaimed an All-India *hartal* violent disorder broke out in some cities. Mr. Gandhi was shocked. He imposed upon himself a penitential fast and suspended his programme, publicly confessing that his call for civil disobedience was an error. He announced instead a programme of moral propaganda for

educating the public and making them fit for the practice of non-violence.

In December 1919 he welcomed with enthusiasm the proclamation which announced the Royal Assent to the Government's Reform Act of 1919. He went further and persuaded the Congress against the advice of the left wing to accept and work the reforms.

But the behaviour of the British House of Lords over the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy caused serious misgivings. Besides, as a true friend of the Muslims he took up their cause and they in turn professed allegiance to the *satyagraha* principle. A Hindu-Muslim *entente* was duly established and in 1920 Mr. Gandhi was the leader and spokesman of both communities. The publication of the Turkish peace treaty was made the occasion for the inauguration of the campaign of non-co-operation against the Government. The Nagpur session of the Congress of 1920 accepted Mr. Gandhi's objective and the old Congress creed was altered in such fashion as to eliminate the declared adherence to the British connexion and to constitutional methods of agitation. The Congress approved of his programme and placed its organization at his service. From this time onwards the Congress was dominated by one single leader. With no one to challenge him, Mr. Gandhi was the Congress and the Congress was Mr. Gandhi.

A widespread campaign of non-co-operation was waged throughout the country. Mr. Gandhi openly avowed that his purpose was revolutionary. 'Non-co-operation,' he said, 'though a religious and strictly moral movement, deliberately aims at the overthrow of the Government.' It started with the



resignation of honours and office of every kind from the highest to the lowest. This was not a success, as those employed in Government service could not in the majority of cases make the sacrifice. There was furthermore the boycott of Government schools and colleges and finally a refusal to pay taxes. The elections to the first Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Councils took place at the height of the non-co-operation movement. Non-co-operators held aloof with the result that the Home Rulers, Liberals and other conservative elements which went to them got a chance of seeing how the reforms worked in practice. Simultaneously Mr. Gandhi launched an economic programme of *khaddar* spinning and weaving upon which he insisted to the point of making membership of the Congress depend upon it. The spinning-wheel in his view would solve the poverty of the Indian peasant. To a certain extent it would, for tedious as it was, spinning required little capital or skill in manipulation, while with moderate industry a few annas could be made daily to supplement the cultivator's meagre income from the soil. The political lesson of the *charka* was that India must grow rich by producing her own clothing and other requirements, and by ceasing to be exploited by others. This was warmly supported by the infant industries of India which had established themselves during the war and were now in danger of being swept away by the attempted return to pre-war conditions. Liquor was another cause not only of poverty but of moral degradation and against it there was a campaign. These lessons were brought home to the masses by the intensive picketing of

cloth and liquor shops and by bonfires of foreign cloth.

The first setback came in the form of the Moplah rebellion in Southern India as the result of the violent aspect the Khilafat agitation took there. Muslim fanaticism, instead of turning its violence on the Government, turned it on peaceable Hindus. The rebellion had to be put down by military measures. Mr. Gandhi, however, regarded this as an irrelevance. His belief in the conversion of his followers and of the masses to whom they preached to his doctrine of non-violence was unshakable. While he continued his exhortations for non-violence under all circumstances, the violence of his language was snapping respect for authority. The second setback to his campaign came in the form of riots during the visit of the Prince of Wales to Bombay. The visit was described as an 'unbearable provocation to the people of India who did not want to see the representative of a system of which she is sick to death'. Mr. Gandhi was naturally horrified by the rioting and bloodshed of which he was an eyewitness.

A group of mediators had tried to bring Mr. Gandhi into personal conference with Lord Reading but negotiations, which lasted two months, broke down completely owing to Mr. Gandhi's unflinching demands. He required the Government to release all prisoners and guarantee non-interference with non-co-operation activities. This breakdown was followed by the meeting of the Congress at Allahabad. The organization of mass civil disobedience was authorized and Mr. Gandhi was given dictatorial powers as the sole executive agent of the Congress. It was a challenge to the

Government to do its worst. The Congress completely identified itself with Mr. Gandhi's programme and embarked upon a policy of mass action which was beyond the most extravagant dreams of its original founders. The Government, however, was not prepared to stand by and watch the beginning of the revolution, which Mr. Gandhi declared was his object. Upon the occurrence of the Chauri-Chaura tragedy when a mob of rioters killed and burnt 21 policemen and watchmen, the Government acted swiftly. Mr. Gandhi was arrested, convicted of sedition and sentenced to imprisonment for six years on 1 March 1922.

With the arrest and imprisonment of Mr. Gandhi the non-co-operation movement collapsed. It depended too much on the efforts of a single man to supply the required driving force. The masses who were called upon to make a bid for Swaraj were not sufficiently alive to the importance of concerted action or were too lethargic to act non-violently. Besides there was no understanding in the rural areas of the political or spiritual implications of the movement. The education of the people was at such a backward stage that in spite of the fact that Congressmen had begun to penetrate to the villages, there was not that burning indignation against the Government which is necessary for a revolution. If the people were dissatisfied with the existing system of administration their doubts of what was going to replace it were serious. Besides the Government was ready to cope with any situation and to visit disaffection with exemplary punishment. Mr. Gandhi gave up non-co-operation apparently because of the outbreaks of violence but the

coolness of large sections of the population, including the minority communities, in the face of incitement must have also influenced his decision.

Realizing the limitations of India as a scene of the translation into practice of his gospel of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, Mr. Gandhi, after his release from prison long before the expiry of his term of imprisonment, led a retired life in his *ashram* at Sabarmati, writing his autobiography, and was only dragged out again into politics to settle many points in dispute within the Congress which during his retirement had fallen on evil days.

It must not be supposed, however, that there were no dissentient voices against Mr. Gandhi's methods. Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, for instance, condemned the revolutionary programme which had been substituted for the ideals of Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale. In Bengal there was much criticism of Mr. Gandhi's programme as completely out of touch with reality. But the reply of the rank and file of the Congress who put their implicit faith in the capacity of Mr. Gandhi to deliver the country from its political subordination, even if it meant temporary pain and hardship, was that the Liberals, while professing patriotism, were prepared to make no sacrifices or to undergo any discomforts. Their constitutional agitation, it was declared, was withdrawn the moment the Government showed signs of irritation. In the opinion of the Congress the Liberals lacked the courage of their convictions.

#### § 5.—*The Swaraj Party*

Upon the removal of Mr. Gandhi from active politics, the Congress split up into two camps, one

continuing the attitude of non-co-operation with regard to the new Councils and Assembly and the other, under the leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, forming a Swaraj Party inspired by Congress aims to wreck the Constitution from within unless its demands for a better constitution was granted. In this work they were helped by the moderates who, in their dissatisfaction with the working of the Reforms, had asked in 1921 for the establishment of provincial autonomy and the introduction of responsibility at the Centre. The Secretary of State replied with a complete *non possumus*. The advance in responsible government which in 1919 had fascinated the moderates proved to be illusory. For they found out that the Executive was not responsible to the Legislature except in the transferred sphere in the Provinces, the Legislature had no real power of the purse, important portfolios such as those of finance, law and order were still under the control of the Executive and extraordinary powers were vested in the Viceroy. In demanding an early revision of the Constitution the Moderates joined forces with the Swarajists, particularly because they were disappointed with the results they had attained after running contrary to popular opinion in seeking election to the legislatures.

In the second Assembly the Swarajists captured no less than 45 out of 105 elective seats. They were pledged to a policy of 'uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction, with a view to making Government through the Assembly and the Provincial Councils, impossible'. Early in 1924 a debate on the constitutional question took place in the Assembly, on a resolution asking for a

revision of the 1919 Act. Pandit Motilal Nehru added an amendment calling for a Round Table Conference to recommend a scheme for the establishment of full responsible Government in India. This debate was important because of the official interpretation of the term 'responsible Government' which emerged from the Government benches. Sir Malcolm Hailey, Home Member of the Government of India, said: 'If you analyse the term "full Dominion self-government" you will see that it is of somewhat wider extent conveying that not only will the Executive be responsible to the Legislature, but the Legislature will in itself have the full powers which are typical of the modern Dominion. I say there is some difference of substance because responsible government is not necessarily incompatible with a Legislature with limited or restricted powers. It may be that full Dominion self-government is the logical outcome of responsible government, nay it may be the inevitable and historical development of responsible government, but it is a further and a final step.'

A departmental committee was appointed to go into the constitutional question, but its reports, majority and minority enabled no progress to be made. In the meantime a Labour Government had been formed in England with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister. This revived the hopes of all political parties in India. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald encouraged them in an early speech: 'We know of the serious condition of affairs in India and we want to improve it. . . If I may say so to our Indian friends, do your bit for British democracy; keep your faith in a British Govern-

ment. . . . An inquiry is being held by the Government which means that the inquiry is a serious one. We do not mean it to be an expedient for wasting and losing time. We mean that the inquiry shall produce results which will be the basis for consideration of the Indian constitution, its working, and its possibilities, which we hope will help Indians to co-operate on the way towards the creation of a system which will be self-government.'

By the time evidence was taken by the Committee, there was a return of the Conservatives to power and this was reflected not only in the recommendations of the majority report, but in the decision to take fresh evidence after the change of Government. Throughout this period we see India becoming a party question and the character of Britain's India policy changing with every change in the fortunes of the British political parties. In India there was in official circles a progressive tendency to whittle down the meaning of self-government. It appeared to the Government of India that the promise had been too liberal. The Conservative Government of England did not propose to take any action upon the report of the Reforms Inquiry Committee, and in spite of the failure of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms to impress even a Conservative Government, which did not cause surprise, there was keen disappointment. Instead of appointing a fresh Commission to suggest another constitution, Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State, challenged Indians themselves to produce a constitution which carried behind it a measure of general agreement among the peoples of India.



The position was met by 'The Indian National Demand' embodied by Pandit Motilal Nehru in an amendment to a resolution proposing the approval of the Majority Report of the Reforms Inquiry Committee. The principles of the amendment were briefly as follows. There was to be responsible government in the Central Legislature. The Executive was to be responsible to the Legislature except in certain particulars, namely—expenditure on the military services up to a fixed limit, expenditure classed as 'political' and 'foreign' and payment of debts and liabilities. In the Provinces there would be autonomy and the abolition of dyarchy. The right was claimed for India to be able to change her own constitution after the transitional period during which Britain retained certain powers of interference. There was also a demand for a Round Table Conference. But the British Government took no notice of this resolution of the Assembly.

When Lord Irwin took up the Viceroyalty in 1926 he found India a land of despair. The evil spirit of communalism could not be exorcised. All the efforts made by political India to drive home to the Government the necessity of constitutional revision had met with even less success. Neither the friendly reasoning of Moderates in the first Assembly nor the gesture of co-operation implied by the entry of Congressmen in the second Assembly nor the unanimous request of all shades of opinion which was embodied in the National Demand had induced any change of the Government's dogged adherence to the terms of the Government of India Act of 1919. Confidence in the sincerity of British declarations had disappeared. Belief in the method of reason and persuasion was fast being replaced by

a conviction that more desperate methods were the only ones that were likely to have any effect.

While on the whole the entry of the Swarajist Party into the Councils for obstructionist purposes was without result, for the Government had powers to meet obstruction with certification, in the country the Congress was without a practical policy. There gradually came a lull in Indian politics. The Congress met annually as before ; but it had become a huge and unwieldy organization for the purposes of deliberation. Its plenary sessions were now increasingly disturbed by petty controversies. Mr. Aldous Huxley, the novelist, who was a visitor to the Cawnpore Congress, described a day's proceedings as follows : ' Some of the speeches were in Hindi. When a man began in English there would be a shout of " Hindi ! Hindi ! " from the patriots of Upper India. Those, on the other hand, who began in Hindi would find themselves interrupted by protests by the Tamil speaking delegates from the South who called for English. Pandit Motilal Nehru, the leader of the Swaraj Party, delivered his principal oration in Hindi. When it was over an excited man jumped up and complained to the President and the Congress at large that he had spent upwards of a hundred rupees coming from somewhere beyond Madras to listen to his leader—a hundred rupees, and the leader had spoken in Hindi ; he had not understood a single word. Later in the day one of his compatriots mounted the rostrum and retaliated on the North by making a very long and totally incomprehensible speech in Tamil. The North was furious naturally. These are some of the minor complexities of Indian politics.'

§ 6.—*The Simon Commission*

Since the withdrawal of the non-co-operation movement there had been little excitement in Indian politics. The release of Mr. Gandhi after an operation for appendicitis gave a renewed hope to nationalists, but he preferred to retire to the seclusion of his *ashram* at Sabarmati. The Congress Party in the Councils introduced liveliness into the dull debates on dull subjects, but that was as far as it got.

Since the time the Congress came under Mr. Gandhi's influence there was a definite advance in aim. The Congress embarked upon politics calculated to transfer power to it from the Government of India. There was Mr. Gandhi's agitation over the rate of assessment in the Kaira District which formed a trial of strength and a training for subsequent non-co-operation. With the success of his methods to encourage him, Mr. Gandhi shortly afterwards declared non-co-operation throughout India. The object in both cases was to paralyse the Government and to force it to yield to the demands of Mr. Gandhi and the Congress. In 1928 there was the Bardoli agitation over land assessment led by Mr. Vallabhai Patel, during which the technique of *satyagraha* was perfected. The people of Bardoli taluka refused to pay their assessment and reduced the Government to the enforcement of such doubtful remedies as the confiscation of property, including cattle, for which there were no buyers. The success of Congressmen who concentrated their efforts in this locality for a few months again persuaded Mr. Gandhi that the time was ripe for an All-India

campaign of *satyagraha* for the motivation of which a series of grievances connected with the appointment of the Simon Commission and the refusal to fix the scope of the Round Table Conference to the drafting of a Dominion Constitution had accumulated.

The Congress, however, learnt one important lesson from its experience in the legislatures, namely, that there were political parties in the country which not only differed from them in opinion but were prepared to maintain their individuality. From the National Parliament conceived and organized by the founders in 1885 the Congress had dwindled down into a party which, owing to the arrangements made for special representation under the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme, could not command a majority anywhere. Not only was the dream of wrecking the Councils from within difficult of realization under these circumstances, but the Swaraj Party was forced to combine with others for the purposes of essential legislation. The position was just as anomalous as that in which Mr. Gandhi and others who believed in civil disobedience found themselves in 1933-34 when they were trying to obtain support for temple entry bills in the Legislative Assembly.

The loss of the original universality of the Congress was particularly noticeable during the agitation over the Simon Commission. Objection was raised to the composition of the Commission by all political parties, but the Congress found it necessary during the many stages of the controversy which followed, to associate itself with the other political parties claiming to represent political opinion in the country. Had the Congress

been alone in opposition it is doubtful whether the British Government would have yielded.

From the first the appointment of the Statutory Commission in advance of the date fixed by the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme was suspicious because the British Government had a few years previously refused altogether to consider appointing a Commission. The announcement therefore of a Commission soon after the communal disturbances of 1926-27 was regarded as another example of Whitehall's perversity. To make matters worse, Lord Birkenhead, in disregard of grave warnings even from Liberals like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, decided upon an All-British Commission. The exclusion of Indians despite the practice of the past led to the immediate condemnation of the Commission and the decision not to co-operate with it. The Madras Congress which met shortly after the announcement, passed a resolution that the Commission should be boycotted, 'at every stage and in every form; that mass demonstrations should be organized throughout India; that vigorous propaganda should be carried on to make the boycott effective and successful; and that elected members of all Legislative bodies should refuse to help the Commission and should abstain from attending meetings of the Legislatures except for certain specified purposes, such as opposing any measures detrimental to the interest of India'.

The unanimity of the opposition may be gathered from a meeting of representatives of all political parties held at the invitation of Dr. Ansari early in January 1928. This meeting expressed itself unanimously of the opinion that

the Statutory Commission must be left severely alone by the people. It recommended that a *hartal* should be observed all over India on the day the Commission landed at Bombay, to be followed later in the day by meetings at which a special resolution should be put condemning the appointment of the Commission and calling upon public bodies to boycott it. It maintained that the constitution of India should be framed by Indians, and strongly supported a proposal for a special convention to frame such a constitution.

On reaching Delhi Sir John Simon suggested a modification in procedure which, had it been put forward two months earlier, might have made the Commission acceptable. He suggested 'a joint free conference' consisting of the seven British Commissioners with seven others chosen by the Indian legislatures, the two groups to report independently of each other, and the reports to be forwarded to the Parliaments that had appointed them. Alternatively the report of the Indian Committee would be appended to the British Commission's report and submitted to the King-Emperor. The Legislative Assembly refused this compromise but the Council of State and the Provincial Councils, except the Central Provinces, agreed.

An event which influenced the general attitude to the Simon Commission was the publication of *Mother India* by Katherine Mayo a few months earlier. It was a book which not only revealed access and understanding of official papers and reports which are normally unintelligible to foreigners; there was also a material difference between the American and English editions, the

latter omitting most of the author's criticism of Indian Muslims. It was primarily an indictment of social conditions, but it appeared dishonest to interweave political theses. The inference was that Miss Mayo had been hired by the Government of India to write the book and damn Indians in the eyes of the world. All these suspicions were probably groundless, but they helped to poison the political atmosphere. The important point is that this unhappy book determined the reaction to the Simon inquiry.

Lord Birkenhead had twice challenged Indians to produce an acceptable constitution of their own. An All-Parties Conference met therefore at Delhi in 1928 and a committee was appointed 'to consider and determine the principles of the constitution of India'. Its report, known as the Nehru Report, assumed Dominion Status as the basis of the constitution and outlined the main features of what was calculated to satisfy all parties.

There was to be an Indian Parliament with two houses, the Lower House of 500 members elected by adult franchise. The Upper House would be composed of 200 members, to be elected by the Provincial Councils. The life of the Lower House to be five years and of the Upper House seven. There would be complete autonomy in the Provinces, whereas at the Centre the Governor was to appoint a chief minister who would select his colleagues. The report also provided that a Supreme Court for all India, whose functions included not only the hearing of appeals from the High Courts but also the hearing of disputes in connexion with the treaties, engagements and



*sanads* between the Indian Commonwealth and the Indian States. It also provided for a Federation between British India and the Indian States, if the latter were willing to accept the federal idea. All existing treaties would be binding on the Commonwealth which would take the position of the Government of India in relation to the States. The entire question of the services, recruitment, salaries and pensions, would be re-examined. The portfolio of defence would be held by an Indian minister responsible to the Central Legislature and a Standing Committee would be appointed to advise the Government on questions of defence and general policy. Amendments to the Constitution were to be secured by the passing of a Bill by the joint session of both the Houses of the Indian Parliament and by a two-thirds majority.

So far the outline of the constitution was acceptable to all parties and communities. But it was the communal question upon which the Report foundered. The principle upon which its solution was based was not to give dominion to one community over the other where this was possible, but to prevent the harassing and exploitation of one community by another. The Report rejected the existing system of separate electorates as bad for the growth of a national spirit, and still worse for a minority community, as they made the majority independent of its votes. Election to the Central and Provincial legislatures would therefore be by joint mixed electorates, but there would be reservation of seats for Muslims in the Central and certain Provincial legislatures. Where the Muslims or the Hindus were in the majority there would

13. be no reservation for the majority community. This was, however, a refusal of the Muslim demand for reservation even in those provinces where they enjoyed a majority. The claim for reservation of seats for the majority simultaneously with the claim for responsible government, said the Nehru Report, was absurd.

‘Responsible government is understood to mean’, declared the Report, ‘a government in which the Executive is responsible to the Legislature and the Legislature to the electorate. If the members of the Executive with the majority behind them, have all got in by reservation and not by the free choice of the electorate there is neither representation of the electorate nor any foundation for responsible government. Reservation of seats for a majority community gives to that community a statutory right to govern the country independently of the wishes of the electorate and is foreign to all conceptions of popular government.’

Muslims and Sikhs were opposed to the Report though the Congress accepted it. The All-Parties Conference considered the report and had it amended in some minor respects. Apart from the communalists, opposition came from the small but growing body of opinion which demanded not Dominion Status for India, as the Nehru Report envisaged, but complete independence. Much encouragement was obtained for this view from the fact that an Indian Dominion on a status of equality with the British Dominions would presuppose the existence of complete racial equality as between Indians and Europeans; but as the composition of the Simon Commission showed, there was no intention on the part of the British

Government to acknowledge any such racial equality. To talk of Dominion Status under these conditions was therefore ridiculous. It was compulsory for India, thought this section for the satisfaction of her racial pride, that the country should be free and independent of the British Commonwealth.

The controversy between those who stood for complete independence and those who preferred to be satisfied with Dominion Status became acute within the Congress. At the Session of 1928 a split was prevented by the personal intervention of Mr. Gandhi who was induced to come out of his retirement. Ever since he had been put away behind prison bars the Congress had begun to be afflicted with endless wrangling between various groups of those who were determined to wreck the legislatures and those who were prepared to temper opposition with a measure of co-operation. The controversy had been forgotten in the midst of the excitement caused by the Statutory Commission. Now that the Indian goal was either Dominion Status or complete independence, and the Congress could not agree on the choice, Mr. Gandhi was summoned to effect a compromise between the opposing parties.

His solution of the difficulty took the form of a time limit within which the authorities were to grant India Dominion Status ; failing this complete independence was to become the goal of the Congress. Thus both parties were satisfied. The resolution is worth recalling ; 'Subject to the exigencies of the political situation, this Congress will adopt the Constitution (the Nehru outline of a Dominion constitution) in its entirety if it is accepted by the

British Parliament on or before December 31, 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance, or its earlier rejection, Congress will organize non-violent non-co-operation by advising the country to refuse taxation or in such other manner as may be decided upon. Consistently with the above, nothing in this resolution shall interfere with the carrying on in the name of the Congress, of the propaganda for complete independence.'

The next important event was the announcement by Lord Irwin on 31 October 1929, made on the authority of the British Cabinet, that 'it was implicit in the Declaration of August 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status'. This was supplemented by the proposal for a Round Table Conference after the publication of the Simon Commission's Report, but before the Government passed proposals for India's constitutional future. Here evidently was an opportunity for Indians to make whatever changes they deemed necessary in the recommendations of the Simon Commission and to influence the constitutional proposals of the British Government. The decision to summon leading Indian politicians to a Round Table Conference in London indicated an important change of policy, for which the Labour Government was mainly responsible.

The reaction in India was favourable to co-operation. Congress leaders met the Moderates and Muslims in a conference to express their appreciation of the sincerity underlying the announcement of policy. They suggested that it was vital for the success of the proposed Round Table Conference that a policy of general conciliation

should be adopted, that political prisoners should be released and that the representation of political organizations should be effectively secured on the Conference. They interpreted the declaration to mean that a Dominion Constitution was actually to be framed at the Conference. The reaction in Great Britain, however, was most unfavourable. The debates in the House of Commons, where the die-hards expressed themselves violently, were extremely disappointing. The unsuccessful attempt of Indian leaders to obtain from Lord Irwin an assurance that the scope of the Round Table Conference was to work out the details of a Dominion Constitution made the situation hopeless. The work of the Lahore Congress thus became easy in the temper in which the politically-minded classes found themselves.

When the Congress met, however, opinion was divided on the issue of the Round Table Conference. While it seemed probable that the majority of the delegates would support Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who was against taking part in the Round Table Conference, there was an influential section, led by the older Congressmen, such as Pandit Malaviya and Mr. N. C. Kelkar, who were in favour of the Congress being represented on the Conference. There was also a demand for a militant policy in regard to civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes. The feeling of the Congress may be gauged from the fact that only by a narrow majority was Mr Gandhi able to carry a decision condemning an attempt which a few days earlier had been made on the life of the Viceroy.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential address was full of the new spirit. He declared that

Rs. independence was the only possible goal. 'Independence for us means complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism . . . The Congress has not acknowledged and will not acknowledge the right of the British Parliament to dictate to us in any way.' He added: 'We have not the material or the training for organized violence, and individual or sporadic violence is a confession of despair. The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds, and if we reject the way of violence it is because it promises no substantial results. But if this Congress or the nation at any future time, comes to the conclusion that methods of violence will rid us of slavery, then I have no doubt that it will adopt them. Violence is bad, but slavery is far worse.'

This was the beginning, if it was necessary to have a beginning at all, of the revolutionary movement within the Congress which has tried to capture its organization for programmes of violence and disorder. The aims of the party of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were not political only but economic. Among the objectives at which they aimed was a workers' and peasants' revolution and a proletarian dictatorship. The influence of the Soviet example is obvious ; but more than that, they showed the conviction that without economic power, political power meant nothing. Dominion Status with safeguards signified to them a gradual substitution of Indian capitalists for foreign capitalists as the real rulers of the land. The revolutionary wing of the Congress led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were opposed to the landed and the moneyed interests, foreign or Indian. They

opposed British rule in India not so much for racial reasons as for the privileges it was supposed to give to capitalists and foreign capitalists at that. However, they cast their lot in with the main body of the Congress which did not sympathize with their ambitions, because it was a way ultimately of realizing their own. Once the Government of India was captured by Indians it would not be difficult to give it a Communist or any other character.

Largely as the result of left wing influence the resolution which was finally adopted at Lahore expressed appreciation of the efforts of the Viceroy towards a peaceful settlement of the national movement; declared that in existing circumstances no good purpose could be served by attending the Round Table Conference; affirmed that the Congress creed should in future mean complete independence; called for a complete boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislatures, and the resignation of the present members; and authorized the All-India Congress Committee, whenever it deemed it fit to launch a programme of civil disobedience including the non-payment of taxes, under such safeguards as might be considered necessary. The door was not however closed against further negotiation. The boycott of the Round Table Conference was agreed upon only in existing circumstances; civil disobedience and refusal to pay taxes depended upon the Congress Committee. The Congress was not therefore finally committed to any definite line of action.

It was at Lahore that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made his declaration about unproductive public debt. This was taken up by the irresponsible



sections of the British Press and used with considerable effect by misinterpretation against the claim of India to a fair consideration of the present financial position. In the meantime the Liberals were alarmed at the headlong policy that the Congress was adopting and proclaimed their inability to follow it into a civil struggle with the Government. The struggle might have been avoided if at least the date of the Round Table Conference could have been announced at this stage, but owing to the delay of the Simon Commission in writing its report, valuable time was lost, and Mr. Gandhi was allowed to launch his campaign of civil disobedience, with the Viceroy placed uncomfortably in the position of having to dissuade him with various attractive offers received from the British Cabinet.

### § 7.—*Civil Disobedience*

Independence Day was observed throughout India on 26 January 1930. On 6 March Mr. Gandhi addressed his historic letter to the Viceroy announcing his intention of leading a movement against the salt laws. His purpose, he said, was to oppose the 'organized violence of the British Government'. On 11 March he set out with 79 volunteers from his *ashram* to the sea coast at Danda, and on his way successfully appealed to the people to join him. He finally reached the sea accompanied by large crowds and there openly broke the salt laws. This had a symbolic significance which was at first entirely lost in Great Britain. In calling upon the people to break the salt laws Mr. Gandhi did not aim at breaking the Government's salt monopoly or

organizing a cheap supply of salt ; he only showed them, by example, how they should treat the ' unjust ' laws to which Indians were subject under the existing ' alien administration '.

Exciting events now began to happen not only on the route of Mr. Gandhi's march, but in Bombay, Chittagong, Karachi, Peshawar, Sholapur and other towns, following closely upon the arrest of Congressmen or the dispersal of meetings and processions. It is unnecessary to go into these in detail. Their effect was to spread the fire, for civil disobedience caught on like a fire and spread rapidly. At Chittagong there was a raid on the local armoury by men who were bent on terrorist crime. The hold of the Congress has not for many years been strong in Bengal, and Mr. Gandhi's gospel of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* made but little impression upon men who remembered that in the days of the agitation over the partition the connexion between bombs and boons had been proved. The terrorists were mostly young persons who took to the bomb and the revolver in the spirit of cinema gangland. While in Western India mass demonstrations of civil disobedience were straining the efficiency of the police and compelling them to resort to the painful and degrading necessity of the use of force, in Bengal the terrorists were picking out Government officials for assassination.

The Congress disclaimed connexion with the assassins and expressed horror at their many outrages, but its programme of mass lawlessness undoubtedly gave them much encouragement. Wild passions were let loose in the country. But at the same time it should be remembered that

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despite the violent methods which the police were compelled to adopt in dealing with Congress demonstrations, the volunteers and crowds who took part in them behaved with a marvellous sense of discipline. Evidently some progress had been made in the understanding of the principle of non-violence. It was the police who were in most cases put in the wrong by demonstrators who offered peaceful defiance and did not resist the exasperated violence with which they were treated. The entire campaign was well organized by the Congress and carried out with astonishing attention to detail.

Not only were there demonstrations for various purposes, flag salutations, processions and other means of attracting public attention, but the movement was sought to be universalized by the boycott of British goods. This was carried out by persuasion as well as the picketing of shops. The attempt was this time to bring Britain to her knees by refusing to buy the goods on whose manufacture and export large numbers of the British people depended for their living. The onset of the economic depression in 1929 had already been followed by the slowing down of production and trade in Britain, and the daily decline in the volume of exports and the increase in the total of the unemployed gave the Congress an apparent proof of its coming victory. The resulting pressure on the British Government was expected to cause the grant of political freedom. It was an illusion which was soon dispelled by the result of the general election of 1931 which returned a majority of Conservatives to the House of Commons. This led to a hardening of the official

attitude towards Indian aspirations, though to all outward seeming the policy was continued without a change.

The funds of the Congress, whose expenditure increased year by year, were raised by a number of expedients. Every member had to pay a subscription of four annas, and delegates to the annual session paid five rupees. Members of the reception committee paid twenty-five rupees, and the general public who attended the session paid various sums for admission. The expenses of the annual session were thus defrayed, and the surplus which was often accumulated, would be spent on general purposes. Nevertheless it was doubtful whether the Congress could have organized mass demonstrations either on the four-anna subscriptions or the profits made from the annual sessions. It is also doubtful whether the All-India Congress Committee, and the provincial, district and taluka committees, could defray their own expenses. The necessity for donations always existed, and donations were always found to flow in generously. In times of public excitement rich men and women in sympathy with the Congress were accustomed to give away large sums of money to local organizers.

Though it was claimed that the Congress was the leader of a mass movement and civil disobedience a mass uprising against the Government, it was an open secret that the sinews of war were obtained from capitalists, including merchants. In this fact was read a sinister meaning by Lancashire and other interests in England who claimed that Indian business men were financing the Congress and organizing the boycott of British goods in order to secure the Indian market for themselves.

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This suspicion had been present at the time of the *swadeshi* propaganda during the Bengal partition agitation. It was a natural suspicion based upon ordinary calculations of human motives. As an explanation, however, it is as inadequate as the explanation of the loan given by a British capitalist to the Communist International which met in London in its early days. The distinction between bourgeois and proletarian which exists in Europe does not exist in India with anything like the same significance. If Mr. Gandhi associated with capitalists it was because they were just as necessary to the success of the mass movement as the workers and peasants.

The civil disobedience movement sought not only to paralyse the Government but to set up a parallel Government by the Congress. Attempts were made to set up law courts in the same fashion as during the non-co-operation days. It goes without saying that these courts were never successful. The Congress claimed to pass certain laws of its own during the civil disobedience movement, declaring *hartals* or aggressively picketing the shops of merchants who defied its rules regarding the sale of British goods. Shopkeepers caught infringing the Congress 'rules' were heavily fined, and the money, which was paid as the only way of escaping the social boycott that was put on them, went into the funds for general expenses. In addition to these attempts at executive and judicial functions exercised not only over members of Congress organizations but over the general public, there was an experiment in the organization of a Congress post office system at one stage of the civil disobedience campaign. Needless to

say, it collapsed even before the collapse of civil disobedience.

However, the dislocation of business in India and in Bombay particularly by the end of May 1930, made it desirable to make some attempt towards a *rapprochement*. But on the breakdown of negotiations with Mr. Gandhi, which was inevitable under the circumstances, two ordinances were promulgated. Their intention was to strike at the no-tax campaign, the picketing of liquor and cloth shops and the intimidation of public servants. The Congress accepted the challenge and redoubled its activities. When the fight was fiercest the report of the Simon Commission was published. It met with a cold reception in India from all parties since Indians had no share in its writing. The Congress treated it as waste paper. However, the points of the Simon Report, though they were expressly excluded from discussion at the Round Table Conferences that met afterwards in London, were unconsciously adopted as the basis of discussion. The Commission condemned dyarchy, and suggested the immediate introduction of provincial autonomy. It recommended the separation of Burma from India and the formation of an All-India federation composed of the British Provinces and the Indian States. The Government of India, extraordinary as it may seem, was prepared to go farther than the Simon Commission. It asked for complete responsibility at the Centre, except in regard to external affairs, defence, finance and certain aspects of law and order.

The Congress refused altogether to have anything to do with the Round Table Conference. With the exception of this organization, represent-



ing the largest number of the politically minded classes, almost every party, class and interest was included in the representation of India at the Conference, including the Indian princes. The goal of federation was accepted without demur. The speeches made it clear without a doubt that Indian opinion would not be satisfied with anything less than responsible government and equal status with the Dominions. The term Dominion Status was, however, avoided during the proceedings, as it had been studiously avoided by the Simon Commission.

The federal authority was not to be completely self-governing during a transitional period, when certain aspects of the Central Government would be reserved to the Governor-General. They were such matters as defence, external affairs, and relations with the Princes. The speeches delivered at the Conference were delivered with one eye on India, and their tone was excellent. The Liberals put the case for India admirably; the Indian Princes expressed a larger patriotism for the land than they were generally believed to be capable of, and the British representatives were only too anxious, so it seemed, to compromise their differences with Indians. But the absence of the Indian National Congress from the deliberations negatived the possibility of concrete result. Unless the adherence of the Congress was secured to the outcome of the Conference it was useless to proceed. The Conference therefore broke up; the members returned to India, to try and persuade Mr. Gandhi to see the wisdom of negotiation in preference to disobedience.

The conflict between the Congress and the Government continued without abatement. But



the efforts of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar to convince Mr. Gandhi of the value of what he had missed in London were at last successful. The way was prepared for peace talks with the Viceroy and finally the Irwin-Gandhi agreement was reached. By its terms civil disobedience was to be called off and the principle of federation with responsibility in the Central Government subject to safeguards 'in so far as they might be necessary in the interest of India' was accepted by Mr. Gandhi as the basis of the Congress participation in the resumed constitutional discussions. The agreement was ratified by the Karachi Congress, and in the summer of 1931 the Round Table became fully representative.

The Congress sent only one representative, Mr. Gandhi, though the Government appointed Pandit Malaviya, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mr. Rangaswamy Iyengar, who stood for the Congress view of Indian politics, as delegates to sit at the Conference. The second Round Table Conference, however, never had a chance of settling down to the discussion and determination of the many controversial points that had to be dealt with. The most noticeable defect was the inability of the communities to settle among themselves the terms of their political representation. Hindus and Muslims could not agree because while the one community demanded joint electorates with reservation of seats for the minorities, the other demanded separate electorates. However, the minority communities reached agreement among themselves and signed a Minorities' Pact: but the difference between them and the majority community could not be composed. Finally all agreed to leave the

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matter to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to decide by an award. It was unfortunate, however, that while Mr. Gandhi was fighting a lone battle to whittle down the significance of the safeguards, the other delegates, particularly the Liberals and the representatives of the minorities, began to express their doubts concerning the result of the assumption by India of all the powers and responsibilities which were then resting upon the British Parliament. The situation became definitely worse with the necessary preoccupation of the British delegates to the Conference with the general election that was held after the formation of the National Government. The return of the Conservatives by an overwhelming majority, though it was declared to have no effect upon the policy towards India, definitely reduced the prospects of the Conference achieving any substantial results. Having listened politely to the views of Mr. Gandhi and the other delegates on practical constitutional issues, the Prime Minister dispersed the Conference. The Third Round Table Conference in 1932 and the co-operation of Indians in the Joint Select Committee were also failures.

The delegates, particularly Mr. Gandhi, returned to India with serious misgivings, towards the end of December 1931. In India, however, the situation had deteriorated. Both the Government of India and the Congress were getting ready for a renewal of the fight. On both sides there were complaints that the terms of the Irwin-Gandhi agreement were not kept. The Government promulgated an ordinance to control the Red Shirt movement in the North-West Frontier Province; another ordinance was issued to check

an aggressive no-rent campaign in the United Provinces. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested for disobeying orders passed on him under the latter ordinance. On his return to India Mr. Gandhi observed the change in the situation. His request for an interview with the new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, was refused. Thereupon, Mr. Gandhi, urged by disappointed Congressmen, proclaimed the renewal of civil disobedience to start almost immediately. He was arrested on 4 January 1932. The Government had its plans ready, and issued ordinances all ready made and perfected to bring the recrudescence of civil trouble under control. So effective were they that by the end of the year civil disobedience was completely suppressed.

The ambition to establish a parallel government is found in the attitude of Congressmen towards the parleys with Government in 1931 and the Irwin-Gandhi agreement. With the increasing success of civil disobedience the Congress made large claims whose partial recognition by Lord Irwin drew vigorous protests from Mr. Winston Churchill and other die-hard politicians in England. There was condemnation also in official circles of the Gandhi-Irwin talks because the Viceroy appeared to place himself in a position of equality with 'the half-naked fakir' striding up the steps of the Viceregal palace. In Congress circles Mr. Gandhi was regarded as the representative of the Indian National Congress while Lord Irwin represented the British Government. The signature of the Irwin-Gandhi Pact placed the Congress in the position of a High Contracting Party. Consequently when Mr. Gandhi was in

London discussing constitutional problems, Congressmen in India were criticizing the Government and the ordinances in Bengal, on the North-West Frontier and the United Provinces in an unaccustomed high tone.

On Mr. Gandhi's return the attempt to obtain an interview with the Viceroy was made under the assumption that when there was a dispute between the Government and the Congress the representatives of either side, the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi, should meet to compose differences. This assumption of authority in the country, to question the executive acts of the Government in a tone not permitted even to the Legislative Assembly and the claim that differences should be settled almost in the style of international diplomacy between official representatives was not tolerated either by the National Government under Conservative influence in England or by the new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon. The decision was taken not to interview Mr. Gandhi unless he was prepared to accept what the Government had done to preserve law and order as a settled fact. Mr. Gandhi refused to accept the ordinances, preferring to renew civil disobedience rather than climb down from the position that had been taken *vis-à-vis* the Government.

Mr. Gandhi's appeal for mass action was again a failure, but this time because of the measures taken by the Government to arrest it at once by putting the leaders in jail. The jails were filled to overflowing; the sentences became stricter day by day; the Press was put under restraint; and the movement, deprived of all opportunities for individual heroic suffering, was no more. The

stream of volunteers who courted arrest by open defiance of the law began to lessen until it was a trickle. Men were not prepared to face severe terms of imprisonment under the least favourable regulations as to accommodation and diet. Besides the Government followed the example of the Congress in the matter of propaganda and organized loyalty meetings throughout the country to impress upon the masses the importance of living the life of obedient citizens. The breakdown of the Congress organization for the recruitment of volunteers and the staging of incidents with the police was due also in large measure to the lack of money. The Government was thorough in the execution of the ban against Congress organizations; it confiscated Congress funds, locked up Congress Houses and ferreted out the men behind the scenes. Faced with confiscation, subsidies and donations to Congress funds ceased altogether.

The Congress has been routed in the conflict with the Government; but the Congress is by no means dead. Its hold upon the people still persists. During its proscription, attempts to hold the annual session in 1932 and 1933 were defeated. But the Congress has made peace with the Government by withdrawing civil disobedience and renouncing it for the future. The session which is to meet at Bombay will consider the next step. There is already a party in the Congress strongly in favour of entering the legislatures, and winning Swaraj for India by constitutional methods. They have in view the example of De Valera in Ireland. Under the scheme of political reform outlined in the White Paper there is no obstacle to participation by the Congress and there is

nothing to prevent the Congress from putting its own impress upon legislation.

In August 1932 the Prime Minister published his Communal Award. It did not claim to satisfy any community since it tried to satisfy all. The principle of separate electorates was confirmed, but there was no other alternative. The Muslims were definite as to their minimum demands. Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans were also given separate representation. The depressed classes were given the right to elect their own representatives. This last arrangement moved Mr. Gandhi to embark upon a fast 'unto death' unless it was modified. The efforts of Hindus and depressed classes to save him culminated in the Poona Pact which placed the depressed classes in the Hindu constituencies for electoral purposes, but the number of seats reserved for them was increased. Mr. Gandhi followed this up with appeals for the abandonment of untouchability, reinforced by the moral pressure of a number of fasts to effect the change of heart among orthodox Hindus which he desired. Nevertheless the Communal Award with the Poona Pact does not satisfy a section of the Hindu community and though the Congress is officially silent, there is a move to force a decision at the Bombay session of 1934.

Starting as an Indian National Parliament the Congress, which focussed the national aspirations and served as the platform for all classes and communities, developed into an organization which successfully took up constitutional agitation and then embarked upon a disastrous policy of appealing for mass action to displace the existing Government.

With each enlargement of its ambitions it lost support in the country, first of the Muslims, then of the Moderates and lastly of the Communists.

For nearly fifty years the Congress has been the dominant political organization in India. It has helped to concentrate the widely dispersed talent of the country though it has not succeeded in blending the discordant voices into a national harmony. It has given the country men like Gokhale and Gandhi whose genius, but for its existence, would have been lost to appreciation. An examination of the Congress discloses many defects at the present day, and its recent history is none too glorious. But viewed in its historical perspective, the Congress is an institution in which the Indian Nation, largely its creation, may take a legitimate pride.

